

An Official Journal of Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samitee, India

THOUGHT & ACTION

Committed to Build Rationalist Society

Issue - 4



Vol - 16

Jan - Mar 2017

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Cracker-Free Diwali Festival, 2016

Feed back received from Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti (ANS) activists indicate that there has been tremendous response from school going children from all over Maharashtra to say NO emphatically to crackers during Diwali festival this year. In fact ANS has initiated this movement of environmental protection right from 2006. ANS activists have taken this activity with missionary zeal.

Just prior to Diwali days ANS activists visit the school in their local areas. They will stress upon the importance of environmental protection and pollution free atmosphere through lectures, demonstrations and exhibitions. As a tradition the crackers are being used in large scale to celebrate the festivities all over India and particularly in Maharashtra. The fired crackers ooze out toxic material in the atmosphere. These will also enhance the noise pollution sometimes reaching 100+ decibels. This is certainly harmful to old people, patients and toddlers. Besides the pollution, the crackers are fire hazards injuring eyes and body parts of the children if due care is not taken.

Considering ill effects, ANS is fighting against this age old tradition of celebrating the festival. The activists stress upon the school children not to purchase the crackers at all and save the money for some other good purpose. Activists advise students to insist their parents not to waste money on this futile pleasure. The students take pledge and indicate how much money they can save by not using crackers.

A table showing the branchwise savings from school going students is as under:

Report of Campaign on Crackers-Free Diwali Festival, 2016

(Rs in
lakhs)

District	Branch	Schools	Students	Savings
Akola	Akola	21	5000	20.00
Amaravati	Amaravati	3	1200	2.40
Aurangabad	Kannada	4	1900	193.00
Beed	Kej	3	1200	1.20
	Beed	5	1500	3.00
Chandrapur	Varora	1	100	0.10

Dhule	Dhule	10	1720	0.90
	Nimgul	2	300	0.70
Jalana	Dhansavangi	5	400	0.20
	Jalana	22	13500	3.20
Jalgaon	Amlaner	1	300	0.60
	Jalgaon dist	64	39000	64.00
	Jamner	8	1500	0.80
	Dharangaon	1	1400	1.40
Kolhapur	Kolhapur	50	12000	110.00
Latur	Latur	5	1500	1.50
Latur	Chakur	200	40000	250.00
Mumbai	Goregaon	3	490	1.00
Mumbai	Dadar	6	1750	17.50
Nagar	Akole	5	6000	3.00
	Nagar	2	900	0.90
	Kanhur Pathar	1	1200	0.60
	Shevgaon	5	3500	3.50
	Jamkhed	1	360	0.70
Nagpur	Karadi	3	1000	0.85
Nanded	Nanded	5	2250	22.50
Nandurbar	Shahada	22	37000	25.00
Nashik	Kalavan	4	4000	8.00
	Nashik Rd	1	2500	5.00
	Yevala	7	1400	1.40
Palaghar	Palaghar	40	32000	47.00
	Mokhada	4	440	0.66
Parabhani	Poorna	150	38000	40.00

	Parabhani	120	20000	20.00
	Jintur	78	15000	15.00
Pune	Chinchawad	17	31000	60.00
	Pune	150	180000	500.00
	Bhor	13	2500	18.00
Raigad	Alibaug	11	1800	0.36
	Khopoli	7	2200	2.25
	Tala	5	2500	25.00
	Dighade	4	725	7.80
	Nagothane	6	1450	0.33
	Panvel	17	3700	14.75
	Pali	2	1000	1.00
Ratnagiri	Dapoli	1	70	0.14
	Pachal	10	5000	5.00
	Sakharapada	3	250	0.50
Sangali	Islampur	18	8100	21.70
	Shirala	2	550	0.50
Satara	Satara	11	3130	6.90
Solapur	Karmala	3	2730	0.53
	Barshi	5	3000	1.50
Thane	Ambarnath	3	1470	14.70
	Thane	11	6000	6.00
	Dombivali	14	2400	12.50
	Bhivandi	5	2000	1.25
	Kasare	7	3500	4.10
Usmanabad	Umaraga	2	250	0.12
	Kalamb	7	5000	0.25

	Kaladev Nimbala	2	250	0.12
	Usmanabad	5	2000	2.00
Vardha	Vardha	5	900	0.90
Yavatmal	Pandhar Kavada	18	1260	2.50
	Yavatmal	4	750	0.25
		1230	565795	1576.56
				(Rs in lakhs)

The activists had visited more than 1200 schools, contacted 5.65 lakh students which resulted into approx 16 crore Rs worth of savings by not purchasing the crackers. ANS also requested the local trading communities not to use fire crackers to celebrate Diwali. There was good response from these communities too.

Let us hope the use of crackers will be completely stopped in the near future and public will realize its ill effects.

■ ■ ■

Ignorance more frequently begets confidence than does knowledge: it is those who know little, and not those who know much, who so positively assert that this or that problem will never be solved by science.

Charles Darwin

One of the things that is wrong with religion is that it teaches us to be satisfied with answers which are not really answers at all.

Richard Dawkins

Man is unique not because he does science, and his is unique not because he does art, but because science and art equally are expressions of his marvelous plasticity of mind.

Jacob Bronowski

Evidence: “It Worked for My Aunt Tillie” Is Not Enough

Dr. Harriet Hall

I had a friend who used all kinds of questionable treatments including homeopathy. I asked her how she decided what to try. She said if a friend told her something had worked for him, and if it didn't seem dangerous, she would try it. That was all the evidence she needed. She didn't care about scientific evidence because she said, “Science doesn't know everything.” Comedian Dara Ó Briain had the perfect answer to that: “Science *knows* it doesn't know everything; otherwise, it'd stop. But just because science doesn't know everything doesn't mean you can fill in the gaps with whatever fairy tale most appeals to you.” When Oprah Winfrey told Jenny McCarthy that experts said there was no scientific evidence that vaccines caused autism, Jenny retorted, “My science is named Evan, and he's at home. That's my science.”

There is a huge disconnect between what science-based medicine calls evidence and what alternative medicine and the general public call evidence. They are using the same word, but speaking a different language, making communication next to impossible.

First, there is no such thing as “alternative medicine.” There is only medicine that has been tested and proven to work and medicine that hasn't. If a treatment currently considered to be alternative were adequately tested and proven to work, it would be incorporated into mainstream medical practice and could no longer be considered “alternative.” It would become just “medicine.” So-called “alternative” medicine can be defined as medicine that isn't supported by good enough evidence to earn it a place in mainstream medicine.

“Alternative medicine,” along with “complementary and alternative medicine” (CAM) and “integrative medicine,” is not a meaningful scientific term, but a marketing term created to lend respectability to things that we used to call by less respectable names like quackery, folk medicine, and fringe medicine. It puts everything outside of science-based medicine under a single umbrella, including things that might work but haven't been adequately tested, things that have been tested and proven *not* to work but that are still being used (like applied kinesiology—a bogus muscle testing procedure used by many chiropractors), and fanciful things that couldn't possibly work, like homeopathy. It fosters the misleading impression that all these things might be equally valid.

There is no such thing as “alternative medicine.” There is only medicine that has been tested and proven to work and medicine that hasn't.

Science-based medicine has one rigorous standard of evidence, the kind of evidence government agencies require before they allow a pharmaceutical to be sold. CAM has a double standard. They gladly accept a lower standard of evidence for treatments they believe in. However, I suspect they

would reject a pharmaceutical if it were approved for marketing on the kind of evidence they accept for CAM.

When science-based medicine evaluates the evidence for alternative medicine, here is what it concludes:

- Acupuncture is just a theatrical placebo.
- Homeopathy not only doesn't work but couldn't possibly work.
- Chiropractic is essentially physical therapy contaminated with bogus diagnostic and treatment methods.
- Energy medicine is fantasy medicine dressed up with sciencey-sounding words like "quantum" and "frequencies."
- Naturopathy claims to stress prevention and to consider the whole patient, but that's just what every good doctor does. It offers "natural" treatments that have not been tested or that have been proven *not* to work, like homeopathy. What naturopaths do that is good is not special and what they do that is special is not good.
- Herbal medicine is plausible: after all, half of our prescription drugs came from plants. But every herbal remedy must be tested individually to determine if it is effective and safe; and statistically the great majority of promising remedies fail testing.

So while science says the evidence is lacking, CAM says there is plenty of evidence:

They cite preclinical studies in animals and test tubes, but scientists recognize that even the most promising preclinical studies can be misleading and must be confirmed in humans.

They cite case reports, but we know that case reports are only useful as indicators of what science should evaluate with controlled studies.

Sometimes they can cite clinical studies in humans, but those studies are often flawed. They may be poorly designed or lack a control group, they may be contradicted by other studies, they may be based on such extraordinary claims that we would have to have extraordinary evidence to accept them, and they don't build on each other to create a coherent body of evidence.

They cite doctors who say, "In my experience, X is effective." Mark Crislip, one of my colleagues on the Science-Based Medicine blog, says "in my experience" are the three most dangerous words in medicine, because personal experience is so very compelling and so often leads to false beliefs.

They rely heavily on testimonials and anecdotal evidence. Scientists know that the plural of anecdote is not data; no matter how many testimonials you accumulate, they can't ever prove that the treatment works. Think of all the testimonials over the centuries for balancing the humors with bloodletting.

CAM believers find their evidence very convincing, and it is hard to explain why we don't and how their kind of evidence has been shown over and over to lead people to false conclusions.

Scientists know that the plural of anecdote is not data; no matter how many testimonials you accumulate, they can't ever prove that the treatment works.

You can't blame people for accepting that kind of evidence. They are only doing what comes naturally. Science doesn't come naturally to humans. Evolution equipped us with thinking processes that facilitated survival on the African savannah. Our ancestors had only two sources of information: their own experience and the experiences of other people. If someone said "Don't eat those berries; they are poisonous," there was no way to verify the information; but listening to others was likely to help keep you alive. Humans became very adept at pattern recognition. If a pattern of shadows in the bushes looked sort of like a lion, it was safer to assume it was a lion and run away. The cost of over-interpreting patterns was small, while missing the pattern of a real lion could be fatal. Our ancestors learned to make quick decisions: if it was really a lion, they needed to run away *now*. And emotions served as motivators: fear made them run away faster.

Those thinking processes helped our ancestors survive in a prehistoric environment, but they have become a handicap in the modern world. Today we have more sources of information, but our minds still work the old way. We prefer stories to studies, anecdotes to analyses. We see patterns where none exist. We jump to false conclusions based on insufficient evidence. Emotions trump facts. If your neighbor had a bad experience with a Toyota, you're likely to remember his story and not buy a Toyota even if *Consumer Reports* says it's the most reliable brand. That isn't logical, but humans are not Vulcans. When we act illogically, we're just doing what evolution has equipped us to do. It takes a lot of education and discipline to overcome our natural tendencies, and not everyone can do it.

Ray Hyman is a psychologist and one of the founders of modern skepticism. When I asked him why some people become skeptics and others don't, he said he thinks skeptics are mutants: something has evolved in our brains to facilitate critical thinking. Is it nature or nurture? Or both? Maybe life experiences also incline some of us to think more critically.

So what kind of evidence should persuade us? It's tricky, because, as John Ioannidis has shown us, many published research findings are wrong. Early pilot studies are overturned by larger, better-designed studies. Studies are influenced by researcher bias. Some are even fraudulent. With over 23,000 scientific journals and 700,000 papers published every year, it's easy to find a study to support almost any belief.

In this context, there is a hierarchy of evidence:

- Basic science.
- Test tube studies (in vitro).
- Animal studies (in vivo).
- Case reports—of a single patient.
- Case series—reporting on a number of patients.
- Case control studies (example: comparing people with and without lung cancer to see if there are more smokers in the group with lung cancer).
- Cohort studies (example: following people who smoke and who don't smoke over a period of time to see which group develops more lung cancers).
- Epidemiologic studies (example: studying whether people in countries with more smokers develop more lung cancers. These studies can show correlations, but they can't determine causation. Countries with more smokers might have other confounding factors that predispose to lung cancer).
- Randomized controlled trials (RCTs).
- Systematic reviews and meta-analyses that evaluate all the published evidence pro and con.

The best studies are large, randomized, placebo-controlled, and double- blinded; but that isn't always necessary or even possible. We don't need an RCT to know that parachutes save lives. It's unethical to knowingly endanger a control group by denying them effective treatment. (Anyway, who would volunteer to jump without a parachute?) We didn't need RCTs to figure out that smoking causes lung cancer because there is an overwhelming body of corroborating evidence from several different kinds of research.

Evidence matters. Science works. It's a collaborative, self-correcting enterprise. It never relies on a single study. When a finding is true, it will be corroborated by other studies, and a consensus will eventually build based on a cohesive body of evidence. False findings are eventually overturned and discarded. We can trust the scientific method; we can't trust anecdotes. Sorry, Aunt Tillie!

http://www.skeptic.com/reading_room/it-worked-for-my-aunt-tillie-is-not-evidence/

Courtesy: Skeptic

■■■

In Defence of Rationalism

Manoj TV

What is Rationalism?

In Epistemology (the branch of philosophy studying the nature, sources and limits of knowledge) “*Rationalism*” is “the theory that reason rather than experience is the foundation of certainty in knowledge”. Those who accept rationalism in this epistemological sense assert that knowledge is gained *a priori* (prior to experience) and is often contrasted with *Empiricism* which is “the theory that all knowledge is based on experience derived from the senses”.

Regardless of the validity of the epistemological position of rationalism, that is not the sense in which the word rationalism is generally used in the context of a Rationalist Movement that is actively involved in eradicating religious prejudices, fundamentalism, casteism, superstition and blind beliefs, debunking unsubstantiated claims, developing critical thinking, and promoting skepticism and secular humanist ideology. Rationalism in this sense is “the practice or principle of basing opinion and actions on reason and knowledge rather than on religious belief or emotional response” (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary-11th Edition*). The reasoning of course is the *scientific reasoning*, which is, to quote Alan Sokal & Jean Bricmont, “a respect for the clarity and logical coherence of theories, and for the confrontation of theories with empirical knowledge” (*Intellectual Imposters*).

This broad definition of rationalism used in the context of a rationalist movement should be kept in mind while we further discuss the relevance of rationalism in India today.

Is atheism our exclusive concern?

Rationalists in India have often been criticized by some progressive fellow travelers (criticism coming from religious quarters need not concern us here) for what they call the exclusive preoccupation of rationalists with promoting atheism, and exposing godmen and their miracles.

This criticism is not correct – for two reasons. First, though most (or all) of the rationalists do adopt an atheist metaphysic, promotion of atheism has never been their sole concern. The early proponents of rationalism in South India (of which I am more familiar) such as EV Ramaswamy (Tamil Nadu), Gora (Andhra Pradesh) and Sahodaran Ayyappan (Kerala) were all in the forefront of anti-caste movement. In fact, the credit for reshaping the socio-political landscape of modern Tamil Nadu should be given to EVR. Sahodaran Ayyappan, one of the founding fathers of rationalist movement in Kerala, was closely associated with the social reform movement spearheaded by Sri Narayana Guru. Atheist Centre founded by Gora, an uncompromising Gandhian-atheist, played a phenomenal role in eradicating untouchability in parts of Andhra Pradesh. H Narasimhiah, a nuclear physicist and the most prominent face of rationalism in Karnataka, was a well known educationist.

Defending Debunking

Second, the overt association of rationalist movement with miracle exposure has possibly to do with the wide media coverage received by the hugely successful miracle exposure campaign undertaken by Abraham Kovoov in the 1960s and 70s. Miracle exposure or debunking is, however, not something to be scorned at. As Stephen Jay Gould, the well known evolutionary biologist and Marxist, said in his forward to *Why People Believe Weird Things* written by Michael Shermer, skepticism or debunking is “like garbage disposal that absolutely must be done for a safe and sane life”. If this is true of USA, it is more so in a society like ours steeped in religious rituals and dogmas. Moreover, the ‘gurus’ like Swami Chinmayananda, Asharam Bapu, Amrithananda Mayi, not to say the whole battery of ‘sanyasins’ who took part in the ill-conceived Ramajanmabhoomi agitation, were all hand in glove with the anti-secular Hindu fascists at critical moments. We, the rationalists, hence need not be apologetic about our campaign. We should continue to mercilessly expose these godmen who not only defraud the masses with their ‘spiritual’ demagoguery, but frequently encroach upon politics to the detriment of secular politics in India.

Debunking is also a tool to teach critical thinking. But why critical thinking, one may ask. Are not deliriums more soothing than reason? As an author of a book on Critical Thinking writes, “if we need soothing, then it is *reasonable*, if they are not harmful, to seek such dreams and deliriums, and to do so efficiently. Logic, reason, and straight thinking are tools, our most important tools, for attaining what we want, and for evaluating what we think we want” (Perry Weddle, *Argument: A Guide to Critical Thinking*).

There is however a lesson to be learned from the criticism. It is that we the rationalists should not confine ourselves to exposing astrologers and traditional godmen like Puttaparthi Sai Baba (though we should continue to do this as we have an unending stream of this species trying to occupy the uncertain minds of the religious people), but widen our area of interest. This is because the godmen of today, such as Baba Ramdev or Sri Sri Ravishankar, masquerading themselves as medical men or wellness experts, have been making astounding claims about their ‘ancient wisdom’ or breathing techniques. They conduct *satsangs* and regularly appear on TV channels peddling their wares and deliriums. In the process they play havoc with the lives of the people who search for a cure for a chronic illness, a new epidemic, or even extreme anxiety. We have witnessed this recently when Ramdev claimed to have a cure for AIDS and when he recommended *Amrithaballi* for swine flu. Some of them conduct training courses in various ‘levels’ of breathing techniques (‘basic’, ‘advanced’, more advanced – as we don’t know how to breath!) charging a hefty fee and the people throng to them year after year, course after course, even if they fail to gain any tangible benefits out of it.

Another category is the ‘new-age’ spiritualists *a la* Deepak Chopra (incidentally, this is the man who wrote a forward to a book authored by the American trickster, Uri Geller) who makes unsubstantiated

claims about spiritualism, yoga or ayurveda. We should enlist the services of scientists and medical professionals (including competent ayurvedic physicians) to expose their wild and unproven claims.

Defending Secularism

What rationalists in India value the most, above all else, is perhaps secularism; debunking godmen, miracles, fraudsters, quacks and pseudoscience comes only next. Secularism forms part of the very preamble of the Indian constitution. Though the word 'secularism' was inserted into the preamble only in 1976 by an amendment, our constitution has been illuminated with the spirit of secularism from the very beginning. As the Supreme Court of India asserted in the *Keshavananda Bharati case* (*Kesavananda Bharati v. The State of Kerala*), secularism is an un-amendable part of the Indian constitution. The court said in the *Bommai case* (SR Bommai vs Union of India) that the concept of the secular state is essential for the successful working of the democratic form of government.

The secularism practiced in India, however, suffers from certain infirmities. Though the concept of secularism demands an absolute separation of the state subjects and religion, this has often been not the case in the Indian context. The right granted to the religious minorities to run their own educational institutions, unhindered by any state interventions, is a case in point. The subsidy granted to *Haj* pilgrims is another. This infirmity was compounded by certain rulings of the highest court of the land – for instance, the verdict on *Hindutwa* holding that resorting to the electoral platform of *Hindutwa* in and off itself could not be a corrupt practice. The recent dismissal of a petition seeking a ban on immersion of idols during festivals (the serious ecological damage to the water-bodies caused by paints used in the idols have been noted by various studies) saying it concerns the right to religious practice (*The Hindu*, 21 November 2009) is another example of certain retrogressive rulings by our court.

All these point to the absence of a secular culture among the people of India. Secular politics in its true spirit is possible only if the people themselves are imbued with the spirit of secularism. A secular state with a religious citizenry is a contradiction. All the ailments that mar secularism in our country are due to this glaring contradiction. Only a secular state with secular citizenry will continue to guarantee us the invaluable gains we made over the years – democracy and human rights. Hence, a primal component of the rationalist movement in India should be the unrelenting propagation of secular values among the people.

So, what kind of future are we envisaging at? Here I would better quote, once again, Alan Sokal & Jean Bricmont: "the emergence of an intellectual culture that would be rationalist but not dogmatic, scientifically minded but not scientific, open-minded but not frivolous, and politically progressive but not sectarian".

<http://nirmukta.com/2010/01/01/in-defence-of-rationalism/>

Courtesy: Nirmukta.com

Two critical reviews of Bhagavad Gita:

1. **Bhagavad Gita: Another critical perspective**

Ranganath R

The book “*The Role Of The Bhagavad Gita In Indian Life*” was written by Premnath Bazaz (a Kashmiri Pandit and freedom fighter). I have searched high and dry for this book with no success so far. There are really very few works that take a critical and dissenting look at the Bhagavad Gita (BG). The other comprehensive one is ‘*The truth of the Gita*’ by VR Narla an eminent Telugu journalist. A historian of repute, DD Kosambi has also made some observations about the Gita, but never apparently published any full-fledged study of this scripture. BR Ambedkar analyzed Vedas, Upanishads and other works of Vedic liturgy in a great amount of detail and went through many of flaws of contemporary Hinduism with the precision of a scalpel, but did not write a book per se on the BG. All these four above are no more. And of course none of them except for Ambedkar to some extent were taken seriously. As for those living, other than the blogosphere, there seems to be no writer of repute to bear the cross of questioning the moral and social credentials of BG.

My thoughts upon reading the conventional versions of the Gita

As for me I have read at least four English translations of the Gita and two of them were by Indian authors and also commentaries on some of its verses by spiritual cult leaders like Chinmayananda and Prabhupada. I was struck by the following inconsistencies that were fairly predominant in the scripture:

- Repetitiveness and redundancy of many of its verses
- Contradictions in many of its verses, with some verses in the same chapter contradicting each other and verses in one chapter being negated by verses in another chapter
- Lack of coherence of narrative between the verses in a chapter, verses disconnected from or having no relation to the primary idea of a chapter
- Lack of orderliness in the sequencing of chapters, where one gets a feeling that the current Chapter IV should have come before Chapter III
- Inclusion of verses that are repugnant to human values even going by old primitive standards (verses 9.11, 9.32 and 9.33)

What struck me about the commentaries and other eulogies of the Gita, was that the authors seemed to look at the verses in isolation and whether unintentionally or not, ignore its relations to other verses and chapters and to even broad ideas espoused by the scripture (Karma, moksha, punarjanma, bhakti, atma, ego). Many of such authors are also silent on whether there exists a hierarchy of yoga method (Karma, Jnana, Dhyana, Bhakti etc.) or not, with most taking the line of least resistance which

implies any or all yogas are equally good and the more the merrier. The curious part is that when Arjuna poses a few questions about comparative merits of the yogas and which is precedent and/or superior to the other, it is usually met with evasive, political and replies from Krishna, whom our Hindu religious and spiritual cognoscenti never tires of applauding as the greatest and wisest teacher of humanity. Anyone who makes a comparative study of the current state verses of the Gita, devoid of religious blinkers, will find the character of Krishna coming across as very cynical, evasive, inconsistent, shifting philosophical stances according to convenience, mixing ideas of differing schools of thought at will (Sankhya, Yoga, Vedanta) without any care or regard for their cogency and coherence. How such an opportunistic and willful entity (seen together with his role in the Mahabharata) be passed off as a God and that too raised to the towering heights of religious and devotional frenzy, may forever remain one of the greatest enigmas of Hindu culture.

The true agenda of the Gita and a history-based speculation of its motives

The few and rare critics of the BG have labored to point to the casteist and sectarian agenda of the BG as the most realistic basis of its composition beneath all its specious and pretentious gloss and dross of philosophy, metaphysics and devotional appeals. To accept the plausibility of such a kind of devious strategy of the Gita, it is important to place into historical context the failure of the two foremost texts of Brahmin theological dogmatism (Mimamsa Sutras by Jamini and Brahma Sutra by Badarayana) in the post-Vedic age in stemming the rising tide of heterodox movements like Buddhism, Jainism and Lokayata. It is quite likely that both Jamini and Badarayana may well signify pseudonyms of the prominent or active factions of Brahminical demagogues of their times, out to defend the primacy of the Vedas and Upanishads. Which is what they actually tried to do by means of these two long, prolix and tortuous treatises dealing with the relative merits of the two most fond theological dogmas of 'Karma-Kanda' (part of life devoted to the act of ritual and propitiation) and 'Jnana-Kanda' (part of life devoted to the act of knowledge seeking) and dueling for their primacy. Though both the treatises run into hundreds of verses, with Mimamsa Sutras being the longer of the two, being replete with laborious yet ludicrous arguments to validate the infallibility of the Vedas and Upanishads, they are not worth the paper, leaf or parchments they were written on. In the light of today's atmosphere of rational and critical thinking, it is amazing that these tomes, whose utterly primitive and nonsensical philosophy can be demolished with a few pages of questioning and critical analysis, were the subject of many long running debates. When four orthodox brahminical philosophies (Sankhya, Mimamsa, Nyaya and Vedanta) could not deter the march of the simple yet appealing thought system of Buddhism, the shrewd Brahmin strategists of the era of post-Mauryanism unsheathed the ultimate weapon of the Bhagavad Gita, which was a clever mish-mash of philosophy, social rules, creationism and devotion tailored to sound like a very good clone of the Bible and the

Koran. Thus BG provided a tottering Brahminism the resilience and vigor to overthrow Buddhism and take Indian civilization back to the dark ages, from which it has never emerged into light.

What inspired me into a 'forensics' of the Gita, were some articles in the blogosphere, specifically Nirmukta's BG series by Dr. Kamath, which explored these red flags of contradictions by quoting and comparing many of its verses esp Chapters 2, 3 & 4, where most of the philosophical conflicts between the Vedic, Upanishadic and Bhakti schools of thought come through in some of its more confusing verses. This probably prompted his hypothesis of the multiple authorships of the BG along with suspicions of its varied interpolations, additions and corruptions. While I was sparring with a dyed-in-the-wool Hindu nationalist of my acquaintance, on a different related issue, this charge was dismissed by him as a standard Marxist line. This introduction from the book of Bazaz, explores this theme in quite a bit of detail, quoting historians on both sides of the fence of this argument, with their theories and observations. The author of course leans to the side of naysayers of Gita, but advances many reasonable arguments in his defence I don't know if the taint of Marxism will ever go away for critics and dissenters of religious obscurantism, but I hope this discussion and article may be found to be of some interest.

2. More Truths about the Bhagavad Gita

V.N.K. Kumar

Let me assume hypothetically that Mahabharat is real history and Krishna was a god in human form:

Gitopadesh and Reality check

When we discuss the Gita, the thing that strikes us at the outset is that the occasion and place for preaching of the Gita was highly inappropriate for such a philosophical discourse. When armies are standing in array on the battlefield with the chariot horses and elephants straining at their reins, we cannot believe that anyone could think of preaching deep philosophy, and that too at such length.

The Gita consists of about 700 stanzas which are difficult to understand without suitable explanation. Let us assume that the recitation and explanation of each stanza took at least one minute (Chinmayananda took 30 minutes for this), which is by no means an estimate on the high side. In that case, it would have taken 700 minutes or more than 11 hours for a complete exposition of the entire text, by which time the entire battle would have been lost. One can believe that Krishna gave some advice to convince Arjuna to fight, but preaching on the battlefield a philosophy extending over eighteen chapters strains our credulity to the limit.

Validity of Krishna's arguments

Let us look at the arguments advanced by Krishna to convince Arjuna to wage war against his cousins and elders, and take a look at the logical and moral disputations.

In the first argument, Krishna explains the nature of Atman (soul). He says that atman is neither born nor does it die— it is unborn, everlasting, immutable and primeval. It is not killed, though the body is killed. Just as a man casts off old clothes and puts on new ones, so does atman cast off an old body and becomes united with a new one. As for the body, Krishna says that it is inherently mortal, non-permanent, destructible, and will come to an end if not today, then tomorrow or after a 100 years. As atman definitely acquires another body in accordance with its previous actions (reincarnation theory), it is not proper to lament the loss of the old body. In other words, since Bhishma's (or for that matter anyone else's) soul cannot be killed, there is absolutely no harm in killing him.

Disputation: If this be so, then a murder should no longer be considered a crime—it is only an act of liberating the soul from the clutches of the vile body. If atman is immortal and the body comes to an end sooner or later, does it justify our killing other persons ? It is true that the Kauravas would have died their natural deaths some day, but that could not be a justification for Arjuna to kill them today.

His second argument is that Arjuna is a Kshatriya and it is his caste duty to fight, in keeping with the principle of Karmayoga.

Disputation: Does this mean that a kshatriya should necessarily fight even when there is no valid cause for doing so ? Unless the fighting is justified, a kshatriya is certainly not required to fight other people, especially his kith & kin.

The third argument given in sloka 35 of chapter 11 is: "All masters of the great chariots will think that you withdrew from the battle on account of fear and those by whom you are highly thought of today, will hold you in less esteem. Also your enemies, seeing your weakness will speak much about you that should not be spoken. What can be more painful than that?"

Disputation: The opinion of other people is not a valid reason for a man to fight. Moral courage lies in defying such opinions if they are wrong. If the soul is everything and the rest is 'Maya', why is it that such an illusory thing as a warrior's reputation becomes the only real thing worth saving!

The fourth argument is that "If you get killed you will go to heaven, if victorious, you will enjoy on earth. Therefore, arise, o! Arjuna and determine to do battle".

Disputation: This kind of argument is an encouragement for adventurers and soldiers of fortune to kill other people for the sake of land and property, but not an encouragement for just and honest people to fight.

Thus we see that none of the above arguments are logically valid or morally sound. Arjuna should not have yielded for the sake of worldly pleasures, to commit the heinous sin of killing his kinsmen. Did Krishna & Pandava brothers practice the principle of desireless action themselves ?

Everybody talks about the stanza no. 47 in chapter 2 :

*Karmanye vadhikarasthe ma phaleshu kadachana
Ma karma phala heturbhu mathe sangosova akarmani*

(To action alone you have a right, and never at all to its fruits; Let not the fruits of action be your motive, Neither let there be in you any attachment to inaction.)

Let us see how far the Pandavas and Krishna himself acted on this principle of desireless action. Did not the Pandavas, with the help of Krishna, fight with the desire to vanquish and kill their enemies ? If they did not desire ardently to kill Dronacharya, why did they ask Yudhishtir to lie about the death of Dronacharya's son "Ashwathama" ? Why did Krishna by deceit make Jayadrath think that the sun had set and thus put him off his guard, and then shoot him with an arrow ? Bhishma was killed because he would not fight Shikandi, who was born a female and later became a man and Arjuna sheltering himself behind Shikandi shot Bhishma in such an unchivalrous manner. Were all these actions performed in a desireless manner regardless of the fruit of their actions? Did practice follow precept? Or, is it that Gods and the people blessed by Gods can do whatever they want with impunity, and do not have to practice what they themselves preach ? *So you can all see why the BG is immoral even if it is history and just BS !!!*

Conclusion

Then there is the small matter of the truth of it all. Was there a god in the shape of Krishna and was there a Mahabharat war and were all those people real people ? Very doubtful. It belongs to the genre of Panchatantra/Jataka tales, Aesop's fables, Anderson's fairy tales or Harry Porter's escapades. Fun to read may be, but not to be taken seriously. I say this although I belong to a family of priestly brahmins who believe that Gita is a holy scripture and is infallible.

Courtesy: KESHAVA SHET

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It is a thousand times better to have common sense without education than to have education without common sense.

Robert Green Ingersoll

Religion is capable of driving people to such dangerous folly that faith seems to me to qualify as a kind of mental illness.

Richard Dawkins

Mahesh Yogi and Sri Sri Ravi Shankar

Bhavdeep Kang

Ravi Shankar's first major tryst with organised spirituality was a lecture by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who took an immediate shine to him. The next thing he knew, he was whisked off to Switzerland and found himself travelling the world with his guru.

Sri Sri recalled his days with Mahesh Yogi as follows: "I was into studying the Vedas and he used to conduct these Vedic Science conferences around the country. So many scientists and scholars would come and I attended one of the meetings. He just picked me up from one of these and said, 'You come with me.' He asked me to come to Switzerland for a month or so and then he kept extending. That one month became almost a year. But I was still interested in doing my formal degree. So that is how it started. I was organising various things: yagya, conferences on Vedic Science, Ayurveda."

MN Chakravarti, a former teacher of Maharishi's Transcendental Meditation, who knew Ravi well those years, had a different story to tell. According to him, in 1975, when Sri Sri was around twenty years old, he had attended a TM class in Melkote (in district Mandya, Karnataka) of which he was the coordinator. He initiated the young man into Maharishi's programme after which the two got to know each other well. "We would go to his home in Jayanagar (in Bengaluru; now the Sri Sri Media Centre) and his mother would feed us," recalled Chakravarti.

However, MN Chakravarti found Ravi's father, RSV Ratnam extremely ambitious, "sort of like a star mom". He didn't think Sri Sri was either ambitious or interested in money. "He was a nice boy, very eager, decent and smart. His sister, too, was very nice."

Later, Ravi did a stint in Rishikesh, where Maharishi's ashram (famously inhabited by the Beatles for a space) was located. "We went there for the advanced course. You know, each round of meditation involves 40 minutes and we as teachers are expected to do three rounds. He used to tease me and say that as a senior, I should do more."

He was "sweet-looking", said M N Chakravarti, the kind of boy whose cheeks people have an irresistible urge to pinch. Despite the flowing hair and beard, he has more than a touch of the effeminate, which leads one to ask whether spiritual leaders have a strong feminine side.

"You are just the way you are naturally. It is for others to perceive the masculine or feminine. Because you can't say I want to be this way or I have to be this way and I should not be this way. No, be absolutely free and be natural."

Unlike some great sages in Indian mythology who crossed over from pleasure to asceticism, Ravi had none of the vices associated with callow youth. He neither smoked nor drank. He loved cinema though and in Rishikesh, "He used to take the boatman along with him, to cross the Ganga to town

and see a film... otherwise, there would be no boat on the way back. He would tap on the window of our hostel and I would let him in,” said Chakravarti.

So far, the lad showed no sign of extraordinary powers, until one day when he arrived in Kalady, Adi Shankara’s birthplace in Kerala. According to Chakravarti, “Here, I was given an advanced technique by Maharishi. Ravi was not, although he was there. Maharishi was to leave from a small airstrip 20 kms away. Then Ravi made a prediction. He said Maharishi’s plane would stop, the door would open and an emissary would come and ask for me.”

Ravi Shankar was right, but only partly. The Maharishi’s plane did stop and his secretary did come out. But the chosen one was Ravi, not MN Chakravarti.

The stories converge after that. Ravi was given charge of Maharishi’s Institute of Vedic & Management Sciences, in Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh). He shadowed his guru day and night, flew with him to every destination and was soon regarded his successor. Then suddenly one day, Ravi left – according to him, out of his own volition. Yet another story which did the rounds was that Ravi had, albeit inadvertently, leaked sensitive information to a foreigner who turned out to be intelligence operative and was then sent out of the institute on some trumped up charge involving voucher payments.

So, what was the real story? Sri Sri spoke in euphemisms, as is his wont.

“It (relationship with Maharishi) was very good, nice, loving and cordial. I am sure they had a lot of expectations from me, but then I went into silence and I started teaching Sudarshan Kriya (SKY). He knew I could not stay. It was like a golden cage for me. I needed to connect to grassroots level people. At that time (with Maharishi), I met Mrs (Indira) Gandhi, Jagjivan Ram, all the top people of the country but suddenly, I took leave from all that and changed to village-level persons. I travelled to small and remote villages. My heart was more with them. The sewa (service) aspect was not part of that (the TM) movement. That movement was more intellectual, based on meditation. I was more interested in sewa.”

By the time Sri Sri joined Maharishi, his most spectacular disciples, the Beatles, had already broken up. But more than a decade later, he would be introduced to them by a former TM practitioner, Michael Fischman. Now head of AoL in North America, Fischman played the Beatles for Sri Sri, after he spotted a picture of the band with Maharishi on his coffee table. Sri Sri was delighted with the lyrics of *Across the Universe*, particularly the chant, “Jai Guru Deva”. He then sat through all the numbers inspired by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and later commented that the song *Within You Without You* was based on a traditional Indian raga.

In *Guru of Joy*, Francois Gautier writes that very little is known about Guruji's time with Maharishi, largely because Sri Sri himself appears reluctant to dwell on it in any detail. What seems clear is that he was a favourite with Maharishi who saw him as a trusted aide and a possible heir. But one particularly unfortunate event appeared to have started his fall from grace.

In 1980, a massive yagya, featuring 6,000 pandits, was to be organised at Maharishi Nagar, a vast ashram in NOIDA, in UP. In Sri Sri's words: "Maharishi had his own style of celebrating and did everything with a lot of pomp and show. For this particular ceremony, he wanted everything to be in yellow as far as the eye could see, as this was the colour of goddess Laxmi. So all the sweets were to be yellow, decorations in yellow and gold coins from different countries were brought for this yagya." Despite all the preparation, the yagya degenerated into chaos, with the pandits running riot and protesting against Ravi Shankar.

The disastrous event is described succinctly by Michael Fischman in his book, *Stumbling Into Infinity*. To begin with, many amongst the huge contingent of pandits recruited for the yagya were carpet-baggers who had been signed up by unscrupulous elements on the promise of rewards and a permanent place in Maharishi Nagar. A rumour that they would be packed off without the promised largesse sent them into a frenzy. Eventually, despite the opposition, Ravi Shankar stepped in and calmed the pandits down with the assurance that no one would be evicted.

Although he regained many of the brownie points that he'd lost when the yagya flopped, his deft handling of the fallout created jealousy.

His less favoured colleagues began to poison Maharishi against the young pandit, suggesting that he was trying to usurp his guru's place.

Finally, the tipping point came when Maharishi, with the objective of starting Vedic schools all over India, sent Ravi Shankar to establish the Ved Vigyan Vidya Peeth in Bengaluru, in 1985. Not only was a trust set up with Sri Sri, the late Justice V R Krishna Iyer, Lakshman Rao (then Mayor of Bengaluru) and Justice P N Bhagawati, sixty acres of land had been allotted by the Karnataka government in the outskirts of the city on a thirty-year lease, with a plan to admit 200 children to the school. A little later, Maharishi took a random decision to not only shut down the schools but transfer all the kids to Delhi. Ravi rebelled and insisted he would continue to care for the children in Bengaluru. The battlelines were now clearly drawn between the guru and his favourite shishya.

How difficult was it to part with his guru? I asked Sri Sri. "It was very tough. On the one hand, I had a vision. There were so many people waiting for me. On the other hand, I felt I could not leave because there was no reason. I had all my comforts, I had everything. At that age, I had seen almost everything in the world. It was tough to take an adventurous step of starting something from the very beginning and following my own vision, my passion of really connecting with grassroots people. From

that platform, I could not do it. I have heard that they were not very happy that I embarked on something different."

(Excerpts from her Book

Gurus: Stories of India's Leading Babas,

Price Rs. 295, pp 240

Westland Books)

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"The power of reason is thought small in these days, but I remain an unrepentant rationalist. Reason may be a small force, but it is constant, and works always in one direction, while the forces of unreason destroy one another in futile strife. Therefore every orgy of unreason in the end strengthens the friends of reason, and shows afresh that they are the only true friends of humanity."

Bertrand Russell

"What we want to believe and what is true are, I think, more closely related than the Rationalists would sometimes have us believe."

Clive Barker

"Your strength as a **rationalist** is your ability to be more confused by fiction than by reality. If you are equally good at explaining any outcome, you have zero knowledge."

Eliezer Yudkowsky

"One of chief pieces of advice I give to aspiring rationalists is "Don't try to be clever." And, "Listen to those quiet, nagging doubts." If you don't know, you don't know what you don't know, you don't know how much you don't know, and you don't know how much you needed to know."

Eliezer Yudkowsky

Osho on Mother Teresa

The politicians and the priests have always been in deep conspiracy, they have divided man. The politician rules the outside and the priest rules the inside: the politician the exterior and the priest the interior. They are joined in a deep conspiracy against humanity—they may not even be aware of what they are doing. I don't suspect their intentions; they may be absolutely unconscious.

Just the other day I received a letter from Mother Teresa. I have no intention of saying anything against her sincerity; whatsoever she wrote in the letter is sincere, but it is unconscious. She is not aware of what she is writing; it is mechanical, it is robot-like. She says, 'I have just received a cutting of your speech. I feel very sorry for you that you could speak as you did. Reference: the Nobel Prize. For the adjectives you add to my name I forgive you with great love.'

She is feeling very sorry for me...I enjoyed the letter! She has not even understood the adjectives that I have used about her. But she is not aware, otherwise she would have felt sorry for herself. The adjectives that I have used—she has sent the cutting also with the letter—the first is 'deceiver', then 'charlatan' and 'hypocrite'....

Now I have criticized her and said that the Nobel Prize should not have been given to her, and she feels offended by it. She says in her letter, 'Reference: the Nobel Prize. This man Nobel was one of the greatest criminals possible in the world. The First World War was fought with his weapons; he was the greatest manufacturer of weapons....Mother Teresa could not refuse the Nobel Prize. The same desire to be admired, the same desire to be respectable in the world—and the Nobel Prize brings you the greatest respect. She accepted the prize....

That's why I have called the people like Mother Teresa 'deceivers'. They are not deceivers knowingly, certainly, not intentionally, but that does not matter; the outcome, the end result is very clear. Their purpose is to function in this society like a lubricant so that the wheels of the society, the wheels of exploitation, oppression can go on moving smoothly. These people are lubricants! They are deceiving others and they are deceiving themselves.

And I call them 'charlatans' because a really religious person, a man like Jesus...Can you conceive of Jesus getting the Nobel Prize? Impossible! Can you conceive of Socrates getting the Nobel Prize or Al-Hillaj Mansoor getting the Nobel Prize? If Jesus cannot get the Nobel Prize and Socrates cannot get the Nobel Prize—and these are the true religious people, the awakened ones—then who is Mother Teresa?...

The really religious person is rebellious; the society condemns him. Jesus is condemned as a criminal and Mother Teresa is respected as a saint. There is something to be pondered over: if Mother Teresa

is right then Jesus is a criminal, and if Jesus is right then Mother Teresa is just a charlatan and nothing else. Charlatans are always praised by the society because they are helpful—helpful to this society, to this status quo.

Whatsoever adjectives I have used I have used very knowingly. I never use a single word without consideration. And I have used the word 'hypocrites'. These people are hypocrites because their basic life style is split: on the surface one thing, inside something else. She writes: 'The Protestant family was refused the child not because they are Protestant but because at that time we did not have a child that we could give them.'

Now, the Nobel Prize is given to her for helping thousands of orphans and there are thousands of orphans in the homes she runs. Suddenly she ran out of orphans? And in India can you ever run out of orphans? Indians go on creating as many orphans as you want, in fact more than you want! And the Protestant family which has been refused was not refused immediately. If there was no orphan available, if all the orphans had been disposed of, then what is Mother Teresa doing with seven hundred nuns? What is their work? Seven hundred nuns...then whom are they mothering? Not a single orphan—strange!—and that too in Calcutta! You can find orphans anywhere on the road—you find children in the dustbins. They could have just looked outside the place and they would have found many children. You can just go outside the ashram and you can get orphans.

They will come themselves, you need not find them!

Suddenly they ran out of orphans...And if the family had been refused immediately it would have been a totally different matter. But the family was not refused immediately; they were told, 'Yes, you can get an orphan. Fill in the form.' So the form was filled in. Till they came to the point where they had to state their religion, up to that moment, there were orphans, but when they filled in the form and wrote 'We belong to the Protestant Church,' immediately they ran out of orphans! And this reason was not given to the Protestant family itself. Now, this is hypocrisy! This is deception! This is ugly! The reason given to the family itself was that because these children...because the children were there, so how could she say, 'We don't have any orphans'? They are always on exhibition!

She has invited me also: 'You can come any time and you are welcome to visit our place and see our orphans and our work.' They are constantly on exhibition!

In fact, those Protestants had already chosen the orphan, the child that they wanted to adopt, so she could not say to those people, 'It is because there are no more orphans. We are sorry.' She said to them, "These orphans are being raised according to the Roman Catholic Church and it will be bad for their psychological growth because it will be such a disruption. Now, giving them to you

will make them a little disturbed and it will not be good for them. That's why we cannot give the child to you, because you are Protestant."

Exactly that was the reason given to them. And they are not stupid people. The husband is a professor in a European university—he was shocked, the wife was shocked. They had come from so far away just to adopt a child, and they were refused because they are Protestants. Had they written 'Catholic' they would have been given the child immediately.

And one thing to be understood: these children are basically Hindu. If Mother Teresa is so concerned about their psychological welfare then they should be brought up according to the Hindu religion, but they are brought up according to the Catholic Church. And then to give them to Protestants, who are not different at all from Catholics...What is the difference between a Catholic and a Protestant? Just a few stupid things!...

Just a few days ago there was a bill in the Indian Parliament Freedom of Religion. The purpose of the bill was that nobody should be allowed to convert anybody to another religion: unless somebody chooses it out of his own free will no conversion should be allowed. And Mother Teresa was the first one to oppose it. In her whole life she has never opposed anything; this was the first time, and maybe the last. She opposed it. She wrote a letter to the Prime Minister, and there was a heated controversy between her and the Prime Minister: 'The bill should not be passed because it goes against our whole work. We are determined to save people, and people can be saved only if they become Roman Catholics.' They created so much uproar all over the country—and the politicians are always concerned about votes, they cannot lose the Christian votes—so the bill was dropped, simply dropped....

If Mother Teresa is really honest and believes that converting a person disturbs his psychic structure, then she should be against conversion unless a person chooses it by himself. For example, you have come to me, I have not gone to you. I don't even go outside the door.... I have not gone to anybody, you have come to me. And I am not converting you to any religion either. I am not creating any ideology here, I am not giving you any catechism, any doctrine. I am simply helping you to be silent. Now, silence is neither Christian or Hindu nor Mohammedan; silence is silence. I am teaching you loving. Now, love is neither Christian nor Hindu nor Mohammedan. I am teaching you to be aware. Now, awareness is simply awareness; it belongs to nobody. And I call this true religiousness.

To me Mother Teresa and people like her are hypocrites: saying one thing but doing something else behind a beautiful facade. It is the whole game of politics—the politics of numbers. And she says, 'For the adjectives you add to my name I forgive you with great love.' First of all, love

need not forgive because in the first place it is not angered. To forgive somebody first you have to be angry; that is a prerequisite.

I don't forgive Mother Teresa at all, because I am not angry at all. Why should I forgive her? She must have been angry. This is why I want you to start meditating on these things. It is said that Buddha never forgave anybody for the simple reason that he was never angry. How can you forgive without anger? It is impossible. She must have been angry. This is what I call unconsciousness: she is not aware of what she is writing,...she is not aware of what I am going to do with her letter!

She says, 'I forgive you with great love'—as if there is small love and great love, and things like that. Love is simply love; it cannot be great, it cannot be small. Do you think love is a quantitative thing?—one kilo of love, two kilos of love. How many kilos of love makes it great? Or are tons needed? Love is not a quantity at all, it is a quality. And quality is immeasurable: it is neither small nor great. Whenever somebody says to you, 'I love you very greatly,' beware! Love is just love; it cannot be less than that, it cannot be more than that. There is no question of less and more. And what crime have I committed that she is forgiving me for? Just old Catholic stupidity—they go on forgiving! I have not confessed any sin, so why should she forgive me?

I stick to all the adjectives, and I will add a few more: that she is stupid, mediocre, idiotic! And if anybody needs to be forgiven it is she, not I, because she is committing a great sin. She is saying in this letter, 'I am fighting through adoption the sin of abortion.' Abortion is not a sin; in this overpopulated world abortion is a virtue. And if abortion is a sin then the Polack Pope and Mother Teresa and company are responsible for it because they are against contraceptives, they are against birth control methods, they are against the pill. These are the people who are the cause of all the abortions; they are responsible. To me they are great criminals!

In this overpopulated world where people are hungry and starving to be against the pill is just unforgivable! The pill is one of the most significant contributions of modern science to humanity—it can make the earth a paradise....

I would like to destroy poverty, I don't want to serve poor people. Enough is enough! For ten thousand years fools have been serving poor people; it has not changed anything. But now we have enough technology to destroy poverty completely.

So if anybody has to be forgiven it is these people. It is the Pope, Mother Teresa, etcetera, who have to be forgiven. They are criminals, but their crime is such that you will need great intelligence to understand it.

And see the egoistic 'holier than thou' attitude. 'I forgive you,' she says. 'I feel sorry for you,' she says. And she asks, 'May God's blessings be with you and fill your heart with his love.' Just bullshit! I don't believe in any God as a person, so there is no God as a person who can bless me or anybody else. God is only a realization, God is not somebody to be encountered. It is your own purified

consciousness. And why should God bless me? I can bless all your gods! Why should I ask for anybody's blessing? I am blissful—there is no need! And I don't believe that there is any God. I have looked in every nook and corner and he does not exist! It is only in ignorant people's minds that God has existence. I am not an atheist, remember, but I am not a theist either. God is not a person to me but a presence, and the presence is felt when you reach to the climax of your meditateness. You suddenly feel a godliness overflowing the whole existence. There is no God, but there is godliness.

I love the statement of H. G. Wells about Gautam the Buddha. He has said that Gautam the Buddha is the most godless person yet the most godly too. You can say the same thing about me: I am the most godless person you can find, but I know godliness.

Godliness is like a fragrance, an experience of immense joy, of utter freedom. You cannot pray to godliness, you cannot make an image of godliness, you cannot say, 'May God's blessings be with you'—and that too with a condition: 'May God's blessings be with you during 1981.' Such misers! And what about 1982? Great courage! Great sharing! Such generosity!

'...and fill your heart with his love.' My heart is full with love! There is no space for anybody else's love in it. And why should my heart be filled with anybody else's love? A borrowed love is not love at all. The heart has its own fragrance.

But this type of nonsense is thought to be very religious. She is writing with this desire that I will see how religious she is, and all that I can see is simply that she is an ordinary, foolish person, just the same as you can find anywhere among the mediocre people.

I have been calling her Mother Teresa, but I think I should stop calling her Mother Teresa because I am not very gentlemanly but I have to respond adequately. She calls me Dear Mr Rajneesh, so from now onwards I will call her Dear Miss Teresa—just to be gentlemanly, mannerly! The ego can come in from the back door. Don't try to throw it out. Zzzzz!

I have received a news cutting from Calcutta. The reporter says that he went to Mother Teresa with a cutting from a newspaper about my statement that she is idiotic. She became so mad she tore the cutting and threw it away. And she was so angry that she was not even willing to make any comment. But she has made the comment, tearing the newspaper cutting. And the reporter said, "I was puzzled. I asked that, 'the cutting belonged to me. I had just come to show it to you and to know your comment?'"

And these people think they are religious people. In fact, by tearing the cutting she simply proved what I have said was right: she is idiotic—this is idiotic. I receive so many "compliments"—in inverted commas—from all over the world that if I start tearing them it will be enough exercise for me—and I hate exercise!

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Rationalists and the idea of India

Dipankar De Sarkar

M.M. Kalburgi, former vice-chancellor of Kannada University in Karnataka, renowned author and opponent of idol worship, was shot dead by two unidentified men on 30 Aug (2015). Indian rationalists have been physically attacked in recent months by Hindu extremists, who would rather kill off people with whom they disagree than debate their ideas. Think of India and you think religion. Please think again.

The 2011 Census in India has revealed an interesting fact—the number of people who fell into the category of “religion not stated” grew by more than 300% from the last census taken in 2001. It’s an astounding figure, given that the country’s total population grew by a rather more modest 17% from 1.02 billion in 2001 to 1.21 billion.

Much of the nation’s mainstream media has ignored this particular datum, choosing instead to delve into the rise in the number of Muslims as compared with Hindus—a divisive topic of debate in India if ever there was one because the debate is often hijacked by religious extremists rather than framed by cool, scientific temper.

Now it could just be possible that because of unstated fears, many Christians and Muslims held back from ticking the box against their religion on the census form. Despite growing literacy, government enumerators can be viewed with suspicion in rural homes—who knows where these forms will end up and for what purpose.

Also, the fact remains that the numbers are minuscule in comparison with the billion plus who describe themselves as Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Jains, Buddhists and “other religions”.

Still, this jump in the number of “religion-not-stated” people from around 700,000 in 2001 to 2.9 million in 2011 is reason for jaws to drop. After all, the not entirely unreasonable likelihood that this jump is made up of growing numbers of atheists and agnostics flies against the commonly held notion that India is the “land of religion and spiritualism”.

It is a notion that has been promoted over centuries in Western narratives that tend to largely ignore alternative non-religious Indian traditions, including atheist, agnostic, humanist and rationalist thought. Rational thought, which promotes ideas of tolerance (the Indian saying, “the world is a family” is the ultimate rational idea) has had a long tradition in Indian politics. It runs from King Ashoka down to Emperor Akbar to the reformist thinker Raja Rammohun Roy to the father of the Indian Constitution, anti-caste crusader B.R. Ambedkar.

Most notably, there’s India’s first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, who presented to the world an idea of India that was radically different from what had been imagined by the West—his was a nation

with “a layered past”, a “self-confident actor in international politics”, in the words of the London-based academic Sunil Khilnani in his book, *The Idea of India*.

Not only academics and pioneers of British imperialism (they had great difficulty getting their heads around complex, alternative ideas of India), but New Age hippies, too, have been guilty of presenting this simplistic narrative of a uni-dimensional India—to Indians and to themselves. The Indian establishment, in turn, has willingly bought into it, selling the idea of the spiritual India to the world, particularly the West.

Here’s a rather good contemporary symbol of this consensus around the idea of an India, as seen through the prism of religions:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on his first visit to the US, gifts President Barack Obama with a copy of the Bhagawad Gita. In return, Obama gifts the visiting prime minister a book containing the addresses and papers from the World Congress of Religions held in Chicago in 1893. It includes, of course, the landmark address delivered by Modi’s hero Swami Vivekananda.

It’s a unique selling point, for sure, but perhaps no longer such a peaceful one.

Disturbingly, Indian rationalists have been physically attacked in recent months by Hindu extremists, who would rather kill off people with whom they disagree than debate their ideas. Across India’s eastern border, a similar trend is visible in Bangladesh, where the brazen killers are Islamic extremists.

The Indian victims have been: Narendra Dabholkar, social activist and founder of an anti-superstition organization in Maharashtra, who was shot by two unidentified gunmen on 20 August 2013, while out on a morning walk in Pune; Govind Pansare, 85-year-old Leftist activist who was shot—again by two assailants on a motorcycle—on 16 February 2015, while he, too, was returning home from a morning walk with his wife; and M.M. Kalburgi, former vice-chancellor of Kannada University in Karnataka, renowned author and opponent of idol worship, who was shot dead by two unidentified men on 30 Aug 2015.

The murder of Pansare, whose decades of activism for the poor won the him admiration of even right-wing political opponents, created widespread revulsion in his native Maharashtra, while Dabholkar’s equally shocking killing prompted the state government to enact an anti-superstition bill that had been drafted by him.

In mid-September, police arrested an activist of a right-wing Hindu group called Sanatan Sanstha for his alleged involvement in Pansare’s murder. Still, death threats are issued to other such rationalists.

One possible reason for the assailants to have felt emboldened—so far—is the failure of the authorities to move decisively and swiftly in their probe. A senior police officer in Maharashtra was

quoted as saying in *The Times of India* that he found no similarity in the Dabholkar and Pansare cases, except that both men were morning walkers.

The fact that religious riots break out frequently in India means two things:

- people are armed, and
- that they are willing to take up these arms and kill in the name of their religion.

In such an explosive scenario, atheists and rationalists are particularly vulnerable, even as their numbers grow exponentially.

<http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/5NtSxOBYWjHdiLqvO9hcRI/Rationalists-and-the-idea-of-India.html>

Courtesy: Livemint

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To enjoy good health, to bring true happiness to one's family, to bring peace to all, one must first discipline and control one's own mind. If a man can control his mind he can find the way to Enlightenment, and all wisdom and virtue will naturally come to him.

Buddha

We are shaped by our thoughts; we become what we think. When the mind is pure, joy follows like a shadow that never leaves.

Buddha

False facts are highly injurious to the progress of science, for they often endure long; but false views, if supported by some evidence, do little harm, for every one takes a salutary pleasure in proving their falseness.

Charles Darwin

How Come Some People Believe in the Paranormal?

Sander van der Linden

I loved magic shows when I was a kid. I remember being absolutely fascinated by mysterious events and the possibility that some of us might possess supernatural powers such as the ability to read minds, get a glimpse of the future, or, perhaps, suddenly port into another dimension. The human mind is a curious one. Although it is well-known that children have a lively imagination, what about adults? You might be surprised to learn that a recent national poll found that over 71% of Americans believe in “miracles”, 42% of Americans believe that “ghosts” exist, 41% think that “extrasensory perception” (e.g., telepathy) is possible and 29% believe in astrology.

Other recent polls have indicated that public belief in things like conspiracy theories or other pseudo-scientific phenomena are equally prevalent. For example, 21% of Americans think the government is hiding aliens, 28% of Americans believe that a mysterious, secret elite power is plotting a New World Order (NWO) and 14% of Americans believe in Bigfoot. Recent psychological research has found a surprising relationship between these types of personal convictions; espousal of conspiracy theories, pseudo-science and belief in the paranormal turn out to be highly correlated with one another. What could explain these findings?

While perhaps belief in say, lizard people and astrology seem relatively unrelated on the surface, so-called “magical thinking” may very well have a common underlying “cognitive style” — that is, the way in which we think about and make sense of the world. In fact, a new study explored this very question and suggests that the answer may indeed lie in the way we think about things, or, more precisely, the way in which we fail to think about things.

Two researchers at the University of Toulouse in France set out to investigate to what extent “cognitive thinking styles” are predictive of believing in the paranormal after experiencing an “uncanny” event. The research team designed a number of clever experiments to test their hypothesis. In the first study, the researchers invited students on campus to participate in an experiment that investigated astrological signs as a predictor of one’s personality. After providing their date of birth, participants received a personality description that matched their astral theme. In reality, each person was given the same 10 “Barnum” statements. These are statements that could ring true for nearly anyone (e.g., “you have a need for people to like you” or “at times you have serious doubts about whether you have made the right decision”). Participants were then asked to evaluate how accurate they thought this description was. Before starting the experiment, participants were also asked to complete a Cognitive Reflection Test (CRT) as well as a “Paranormal Belief” questionnaire. The cognitive reflection test is a very short three-item test that essentially measures whether you are more of an *intuitive* or *reflective* thinker. Consider the following example; if a baseball and a bat cost

\$1.10 and the bat costs \$1 more than the ball, how much does the ball cost? The quick and intuitive answer that comes to mind for most people is simply \$0.10. Yet, this is also the wrong answer. More reflective thinkers tend to suppress this automatic and intuitive answer and are more suspicious of the first thing that comes to mind. (If you're curious, the correct answer is: \$0.05).

The researchers found that although both intuitive and reflective thinkers somewhat recognized the statements as being descriptive of their personality, reflective thinkers were much less likely to recognize the Barnum statements as correct. This relationship persisted after controlling for any prior differences in paranormal beliefs. The authors speculated that in contrast to reflective minds, intuitive thinkers might be more likely to accept their "uncanny" experience as proof for the existence of supernatural phenomena.

To test this assertion more directly, the researchers conducted another experiment. In the second experiment, a different group of students were studied, but this time they were told that the purpose of the study was to examine telepathy (i.e., mind-reading). The research team hired a fake participant to act as the "mind-reader." During the experiment, participants were told to randomly pick a card out of a set of five, and then the other participant (the confederate) would "read" their mind by guessing what card they had picked (the experiment was rigged of course). This time, the experimenters asked participants directly whether they thought the event was simply a result of luck, probability or a non-scientific explanation such as extrasensory perception (ESP). Results showed that irrespective of prior convictions, non-reflective thinkers were indeed more likely to endorse ESP as an explanation for their "uncanny" experience whereas reflective thinkers were more likely to see the event as a statistical fluke.

Interestingly, one question the researchers did not answer is why intuitive minds are more likely to engage in such "magical thinking?" Cognitive psychologists have offered one possible explanation; the "conjunction fallacy." The conjunction fallacy was coined by psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky and basically describes a reasoning error where people mistakenly assume that specific conditions are more likely than general ones. For example, consider the following two statements; (A) Linda can predict the future and (B) Linda can predict the future and also read your mind. Logically, the probability of two events occurring together (in "conjunction") is always less than or equal to the probability of either event occurring alone. In other words, although option B may sound completely plausible due to the misleading "representative-ness" of the two events (precognition and mind-reading), the laws of probability tell us that the likelihood that Linda can do two separate magical things is always *less* likely (or equal) to the probability that she can do either one alone.

Recent research has shown that people who espouse paranormal and conspiratorial beliefs are much more susceptible to the conjunction-fallacy. For example, consider the fact that people often endorse multiple (or contradictory) conspiracy theories about the same event, where belief in one conspiracy serves as evidence for belief in another. Yet, the likelihood that two (or many) different conspiratorial explanations about world events are all true at the same time is increasingly unlikely. Similarly, belief in one paranormal phenomenon might quickly lead to the belief that many “magical” things are happening (it can’t merely be coincidence).

You might ask: Why kill the magic? Not everything needs to be explained by science. Yet misinformation of this kind can be harmful. For example, in a recent study, I found that merely exposing people to a 2-minute conspiracy video clip significantly decreases acceptance of science, civic engagement, and overall pro-social inclinations. I call this the “conspiracy-effect”. Although I did not measure cognitive style, non-reflective thinkers may be especially vulnerable to such misinformation. Similarly, the French research team notes that non-reflective individuals may be vulnerable to scams. Indeed, millions of dollars are made every year by people who (falsely) claim that they can read your mind or talk to deceased family members.

Is there any way to protect people from falling prey to such magical thinking? There is some evidence. Research has suggested that these type of intuitive beliefs often interact with emotional processes. Accordingly, a recent study showed that priming people to think more reflectively reduces tendencies to engage in, for example, conspiratorial thinking. It is important to note, however, that neither “intuitive” nor “reflective” thinking alone is always better, as both thinking styles often work together. For example, when overwhelmed by a large number of competing choice options, relying on an instinctive gut feeling can be useful (the “less is more” effect). The real trick is figuring out when to rely a little more on your gut feelings and when to draw a little more on your analytical powers. Although our intuition serves us well in some cases, we may all benefit from a little more reflective thinking before we decide to accept uncanny explanations about the nature of reality.

http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-come-some-people-believe-in-the-paranormal/?WT.mc_id=SA_WR_20150902

Courtesy: Scientific American

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Confusions around term Hindutva

Ram Puniyani

On October 25 (2016) the seven member Supreme Court Bench started hearing to revisit 'Hindutva' cases. These are group of cases where the use of term Hindutva-Hinduism to be used during elections is to be opined. One such case was that of Manohar Joshi who in his election speech said that if he is voted to power he will work for making Maharashtra as the first Hindu state in the country. In another incident Bal Thackeray, Shiv Sena founder and supremo of BJP associate Shiv Sena, said in November 1987, declared that his party is contesting elections "for the protection of Hinduism, we do not care for the votes of the Muslims. The country belongs to Hindus". And "[The Muslims] should bear in mind that this country is of Hindus, the same shall remain of Hindus... if Shiv Sena comes to power... everybody will have to take *diksha* (initiation) into Hindu religion."

The 1995 Judgment, where Justice Varma opined that the word 'Hindutva', "is used and understood as a synonym of 'Indianisation', i.e. development of uniform culture by obliterating the differences between all the cultures coexisting in the country."

This came to be known as 'Hindutva as a way of life', judgment and became popular as 'Hindutva judgment', was used by RSS combine to reinforce their Hindu rashtra agenda. In Guruvayoor temple case again similar opinion was given. Also one recalls that way back in 1966 in a case involving Satsangis, who were asking for status of a separate religion, the court had given the similar opinion, that Hinduism is a way of life, so where is the question of Satsangis being given the status of a separate religion? This does not exhaust the list of such judgments in this category.

Teesta Setalvad, eminent social activist, has intervened in the court in the matter with an application stating that religion and politics should not be mixed and a direction be passed to de-link religion from politics. The hearing of the case is on. This is a great opportunity for the court to clear the air about the terms Hinduism and Hindutva. So far many opinions have been given that since Hinduism has so much diversity, so it is not a religion and that it includes all the communities so 'it's a 'way of life' The words Hinduism and Hindutva have been used interchangeably many a times.

The confusion and nature of the word Hinduism and Hindutva emerge as Hinduism is not a prophet based religion; with a clear cut single Holy book the teachings of the prophet or a single God. Its nature is different from prophet based religions like Christianity, Buddhism, Islam and Sikhism for that matter. It has been identified with Vedas, where the life and norms of Aryans is expressed. In matters of faith starting from animism to atheism may come under its umbrella. The term Hinduism itself came into usage from eighth Century onwards. The term was coined by those coming here from Central Asia and they coined the word Hindu as a derivative of the word Sindhu which they had to cross to this part of the sub continent. Essentially what were prevalent here were multiple religious traditions,

Brahmanism, Nath, Tantra, Siddha, Shiava Siddhanta and later Bhakti also. The first construction of Hinduism takes place to refer to these diverse tendencies. Later Hinduism as religion starts being referred to for the people around these sects. Jainism and Buddhism were also present in good measure. With British coming the construction of Hinduism became well delineated. With seeds of communalism coming up Hinduism started being contrasted against Islam and Christianity in particular.

In late early twentieth century ideologue of Hindu nationalism, Savarkar put forward the concept of Hindutva in a sharper way to present it as 'whole of Hinduness', i.e. it includes Hindu religion as conceived by them and also it includes the politics of Hindu nationalism. So inherent in the term was religion, Hinduism, which had the dominant part of Brahmanism, and it was blended with the Hindu nationalism. Hindu nationalism was being projected by the upper caste, landlord-kings sections of Hindus who were weary of the emerging "India as a nation in the making and accompanying ideas of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. The Hindu nationalists upheld the scriptures like Manu Smriti, while the majority of Hindus led by Gandhi were aspiring for secular democratic ethos.

Hinduism is the most complex umbrella where interpretations are dominated by the caste factors. Ambedkar does point out that Hinduism is a Brahmanic theology. Other streams of Hinduism. Nath Tantra, Bhakti etc. have been marginalized and undermined and it's around Brahmanical hierarchy that Hindutva movement has emerged. It's clear that Hinduism is not the religion of all the Indians. Also that Hinduva has been built around Brahmanical stream of Hinduism. This complex understanding needs to be unraveled before opining on the Representation of People's Act. In S. R. Bommai case the court the Supreme Court recognized the value of this understanding of terms Hinduism-Hindutva. Justice B.P. Jeevan Reddy wrote, "To fight elections on a plank of religion, was tantamount to eroding the country's secular fabric." But, barely a year later, this were subverted when India's secular credentials came to be undermined with the rulings known as 'Hindutva cases'.

The foundation of this understanding is already there in what Dr. Ambedkar writes, B.R. Ambedkar, who played a sterling role in the RPA's drafting; his aim was to ensure that the statute conformed to secular principles. "I think that elections ought to be conducted on issues which have nothing to do with... religion or culture,". Further that "A political party should not be permitted to appeal to any emotion which is aroused by reason of something which has nothing to do with the daily affairs of the people." This is the spirit of Indian Constitution which wants to separate religion from politics

It is a Historic opportunity for the Court to set the matters straight and put the norms back to the basic structure of Indian Constitution, the values of secularism. And finally Hindutva is revolving around Hinduism which is religion to be sure.

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Hinduism and the political project of Hindutva

Seema Chishti

As the Supreme Court considers aspects of the debate between religion and politics and what constitutes a violation of the founding principles of the Representation of the People Act, attention has been drawn to a 3-judge bench of the Supreme Court, which 21 years ago (December 11, 1995) famously spoke of Hinduism or Hindutva as a “way of life”. The BJP manifesto of the following year quoted this judgment to claim it had stamped the BJP as secular, as it “endorsed the true meaning and content of Hindutva as being consistent with the true meaning and definition of secularism”. 1996 was also the year that saw the BJP-led 13-day government at the Centre, followed by the first government by a coalition of non-BJP parties.

The 1995 judgment has been criticised and remarked upon for several things it did and did not do — but the main issue has been its conflation of Hinduism and Hindutva.

‘Hindutva’ was coined by V D Savarkar of the Hindu Mahasabha, one of the most polarising figures of the early 20th century, and now regarded as one of the BJP’s central philosophers. While several government schemes have been given the name of Deendayal Upadhyaya, the former BJP president, L K Advani, swore by Savarkar far more frequently. Whether it was the plaque to honour him at the Andaman jail, or his portrait in Parliament’s Central Hall – significantly positioned to face Mahatma Gandhi — Savarkar was constantly used to push the BJP’s cause ideologically in the days of NDA 1.

Much before he was made an accused in Gandhi’s assassination trial, and even before the Muslim League pronounced its divisive two-nation theory, Savarkar, in his essay, *Hindutva*, published in 1923, put forth the idea of a citizenship of “Hindusthan” based on blood/‘race’ — which effectively ensures that Mohammedans and Christians would remain non-citizens, and would be seen as permanent outsiders.

A Hindu, he wrote, was “A person who regards this land of Bharatvarsha, from the Indus to the Seas as his Fatherland as well as his Holy-land, that is the cradle-land of his religion.”

The 1995 judgment chose to draw the parallel between Hindutva and Hinduism from an essay by Wahiduddin Khan, rather than the mother-book of Hindutva, *Hindutva*. The judgment reads: “Ordinarily, Hindutva is understood as a way of life or a state of mind and it is not to be equated with, or understood as religious Hindu fundamentalism. In *Indian Muslims: The Need For A Positive Outlook* by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (1994), it is said (on page 19): ‘The strategy worked out to solve the minorities problem was, although differently worded, that of Hindutva or Indianisation’.” But,

as A G Noorani has pointed out, this was a misinterpretation — Wahiduddin Khan went on to reject the idea “of solving the minorities problem like this...”

The Constitution of independent India deemed all adult Indians as equal, and consciously rejected the central theme of Hindutva, which relied upon exceptionalism and the exclusion of non-Hindus. The Hinduism of Gandhi and others in the dominant nationalist stream did not tie the Gods one worshipped or where one went for pilgrimage, to the questions of citizenship or Indianness.

While there is a temptation to see the Right to Equality or Universal Adult Suffrage as ‘modern’ ideas drawn from west European philosophies, historians speak of centuries-old traditions that saw several “ways of life” co-existing, sometimes amicably and sometimes with arguments, fights for dominance, and sometimes with indifference. Leading exponents of ancient Indian traditions have written on almost a shade-card like set of beliefs, even before the advent of Christianity or Islam, where the numberline spanned between the Brahmanas and the Shramanas, with a thousand colours in between. Indeed, the folk Hinduism of multiple beliefs cannot be forced into the Abrahamic framework of One Book, One Deity and one way of doing things.

Hindutva was a clear political project in the way political Islam was or is. While the Muslim League pushed the two-nation theory and separatist Muslims got a Muslim Pakistan, those arguing for Hindutva (not Hinduism) did not get their wish. Underscoring the differences and separateness with those who were not Hindu, Savarkar derisively referred to ‘universalism’ and a belief in ‘non-violence’ as opiates. To counter Gandhi’s teachings of peace, and to keep alive the “political virility” of separateness was, and remains, the project of Hindutva.

The huge leap of faith that the Supreme Court made in bracketing Hinduism with Hindutva was noticed by the court itself just months after this judgment. On April 16, 1996, the court said: “It is not necessary to consider the philosophy of Hindu religion and its tenets of tolerance and respect for different religious faiths for the purpose of appreciating whether appeal was really made for Hindutva which is something different from outward practices and some of the following professed by followers of Hindu religion.” The Bench called for a relook at the judgment by a Bench of five judges expeditiously.

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Courtesy: Indian Express

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A Way of Thinking

Carl Sagan

Sagan: It's not that pseudoscience and superstition and new-age (so called) beliefs and fundamentalist zealotry are something new. They've been with us for as long as we've been human. But, we live in an age based on science and technology with formidable technological powers.

Interviewer: *Science and technology are propelling us forward at accelerating rates.*

Sagan: That's right. And if we don't understand it — and, by we, I mean the general public — if it's something that “Oh, I'm not good at that. I don't know anything about it...” then who is making all the decisions about science and technology that are going to determine what kind of future our children live in?

Interviewer: *What's the danger of all this?*

Sagan: There are two kinds of dangers. One is what I just talked about: that we've arranged a society based on science and technology, in which nobody understands anything about science and technology. And this combustible mixture of ignorance and power, sooner or later, is gonna blow up in our faces. And the second reason that I'm worried about this is that science is more than a body of knowledge. It is a way of thinking; a way of skeptically interrogating the universe with a fine understanding of human fallibility. If we are not able to ask skeptical questions, to interrogate those who tell us that something is true, to be skeptical of those in authority, then, we are up for grabs for the next charlatan (political or religious) who comes ambling along. It's a thing the Jefferson laid great stress on. It wasn't, he said, to enshrine, some rights in a constitution or bill of rights. The people had to be educated, and they had to practice their skepticism and education. Otherwise, we don't run the government; the government runs us. You see, people read stock market quotations and financial pages. Look how complex that is. People are able to look at sports statistics. Look how many people can do that. Understanding science is not more difficult than that. It doesn't involve greater intellectual activities. But, the thing about science is, first of all, it's after the way the universe *really* is, and not what makes us feel better. And, a lot of the competing doctrines are after what feels good and not what's true.

Interviewer: *Science does not prove religion, because religion is faith-based.*

Sagan: Let's look at a little more deeply into that. What is faith? It is belief in the absence of evidence. No, I don't propose to tell anybody what to believe. But, for me, believing when there is no compelling evidence, is a mistake. The idea is to withhold belief until there is compelling evidence. And, if the universe does not comply with our predispositions, OK. Then, we have the wrenching obligation to accommodate to the way the universe really is. So, who is more humble? The scientist who looks at the universe with an open mind and accepts whatever the universe has to teach us? Or, somebody who says

everything in this book must be considered the literal truth, and never mind the fallibility of all the human beings involved in the writing this book?

I lost both my parents about 12 or 15 years ago. I had a great relationship with them. I really miss them. I would love to believe that their spirits are around somewhere. And, I'd give almost anything to spend five minutes a year with them.

Interviewer: *Do you hear their voices ever?*

Sagan: Sometimes. About six or eight times since their death, I've heard "Carl!" just in the voice of my father or my mother. Now, I don't think that means that they're in the next room. I think it means that I've had an auditory hallucination about it. I was with them for so long. I heard their voices so often. Why shouldn't I be able to make a vivid recollection?

Interviewer: *Here's what's interesting about this for me. You convinced me a long time ago that it was arrogant for me, or for anyone else, to exclude the possibility that there wasn't some life outside our own, was an arrogance of intellect, that we should not assume. You couldn't prove it, you didn't know it was there, but the arrogance...*

Sagan: Right. We don't know if it's there. We don't know if it's not there. Let's look!

Interviewer: *And, if you take that, why can't you say "There is a lot we don't know!"?*

Sagan: I say it. Watch. There's a lot we don't know. That's what I believe. But that doesn't mean that every fraudulent claim has to be accepted. We demand the most rigorous standards of evidence, especially on what's important to us. So, if some guy comes up to me — a channeler or a medium — and says "I can put you in touch with your parents," well, because I want so terribly to believe that, I know I have to reach in for added reserves of skepticism, because I'm likely to be fooled, and much more minor, to have my money taken.

Interviewer: *You are living with myelodysplasia.*

Sagan: ...or, I have been.

Interviewer: *You have been. Just share with us, because of your sense of language and your sense of understanding, what do you think about it and what does it do for you...?*

Sagan: I didn't have any near death experiences. I didn't have a religious conversion.

Interviewer: *But you thought about what it would be like to die.*

Sagan: Certainly, and what it would be like for my family, and I didn't much think about what it would be like for me because I don't think it's likely there's anything that you think about after you're dead. That's it. A long dreamless sleep. I'd love to believe the opposite, but I don't have any evidence. But one thing that

it has done is to enhance my sense of appreciation for the beauty of life, and of the universe, and the sheer joy of being alive.

Interviewer: *You had a healthy portion of that before this, but even you, it happens to: appreciation.*

Sagan: Every moment. Every inanimate object, to say nothing about the exquisite complexity of living beings... You imagine missing it all, and suddenly, it's so much more precious.

You can watch the interview on youtube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J1cNaFG1VII&feature=youtu.be>

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox/15848277358cb899>

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Dogmatism and skepticism are both, in a sense, absolute philosophies; one is certain of knowing, the other of not knowing. What philosophy should dissipate is certainty, whether of knowledge or ignorance.

Bertrand Russell

The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, and wiser people so full of doubts.

Bertrand Russell

I say quite deliberately that the Christian religion, as organized in its Churches, has been and still is the principal enemy of moral progress in the world.

Bertrand Russell

True wisdom comes to each of us when we realize how little we understand about life, ourselves, and the world around us.

Socrates

If all misfortunes were laid in one common heap whence everyone must take an equal portion, most people would be contented to take their own and depart.

Socrates

India Is No Country for Rational People

Raj Das

It's been 68 years since we've been calling India a free country. But besides changing the colour and design of the flag and the accents of those in power, what have we really achieved?

Over the past few years, we've seen a steady growth of intolerance towards thoughts and ideas that question traditionally held beliefs. Anyone who tries to introduce the notion that you should not blindly follow beliefs, is threatened with violence and unfortunately, the aggressors aren't just faffing about it - more than once they've followed their warnings with action.

Let's look at some of those incidents.

1. He fought superstitions and 'godmen'. One morning, as he went for a walk, he was shot dead.

Narendra Dabholkar, author and rationalist

Indian rationalist and author, Narendra Dabholkar, was actively against superstition and black magic. He believed that the 'godmen' of the country are out to exploit people's religious beliefs. He was also the founder of the Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti (MANS) that campaigned against tantriks and *babas* who claimed 'miracle cures'. When MANS drafted the Anti-Jadu Tona Bill (Anti-Superstition and Black Magic Ordinance), political parties like BJP and Shiv Sena opposed it claiming it would adversely affect the Hindu culture and traditions.

Dabholkar was shot dead by two unidentified men on August 20th, 2013, while he was out on a morning walk.

2. He wrote a book called 'Who was Shivaji?'. He was shot by unidentified gunmen and sadly, he succumbed to his injuries.

Govind Pansare, CPI leader and author

Govind Pansare was a left-wing Indian politician of the Communist Party of India. He was also the author of the best selling Marathi language biography of 17th century Maratha warrior Shivaji, *Shivaji Kon Hota?* (Who was Shivaji?). His book was controversial because it talked about how Shivaji was a secular leader who appointed Muslims as his generals. He also pointed out that Shivaji respected women, abolished serfdom and also appointed Dalits to prominent posts. This, in many ways, was different from the image of Shivaji many political parties presented while pushing their agenda.

Pansare and his wife, who were out on a morning walk on February 16th, 2015, near their residence in Kolhapur, were shot by unidentified men. On February 20th, he succumbed to his injuries.

3. He criticized idol worship. Was shot from point blank range in his own home.

M.M. Kalburgi, scholar and rationalist

Noted Kannada scholar, rationalist and Sahitya Academy Award winner, M.M. Kalburgi, who fought against idol worship almost all his life, claimed in a seminar about the Anti-Superstition Bill that when he was young, he urinated on an idol to see if there was any divine retribution. This angered right-wing groups like Vishva Hindu Parishad, Bajrang Dal and Sri Ram Sena.

On August 30th, 2015, two men entered Kalburgi's home claiming to be his students. His wife let them in and when she went to the kitchen to get them coffee, one of the men shot Kalburgi twice from point blank while the other watched. Then they both escaped. Kalburgi was taken to a hospital where he was pronounced dead.

4. He criticized the Bhagavad Gita for describing women, vaishyas and shudras as 'sinners.' Received death threat from a Bajrang Dal activist. On Twitter.

K.S. Bhagwan, retired professor and writer

Following the cold-blooded murder of M.M. Kalburgi, Bhuvith Shetty, a co-convenor of Bajrang Dal claimed that K.S. Bhagwan, would be the next target for "mocking hinduism". Earlier this year, Bhagwan, a noted rationalist, writer, translator and retired professor, had said that he would burn some pages from the *Bhagavad Gita* because apparently verse 32 and 33 from chapter of the scripture describes 'women, viashyas and shudras' as sinners.

5. He was charged with blasphemy for disproving a 'miracle'. Is currently living in exile to evade arrest.

Sanal Edamaruku, author and rationalist

Sanal Edamaruku is an Indian author and rationalist. He is the founder-president and editor of Rationalist International, the president of the Indian Rationalist Association and the author of twenty-five books and other articles.

In 2012, he was charged with blasphemy for his role in examining a claimed "miracle" at a local Catholic Church in Mumbai. He moved to Finland to evade arrest.

6. His essay claims there are many versions of the *Ramayana* . It was scraped off the syllabus after pressure from ABVP.

A.K. Ramanujan, essayist and scholar

Even though noted Indian scholar and author, A.K. Ramanujan passed away in 1993, his essay *Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translations* courted controversy over

its inclusion in the B.A. in History syllabus of the University of Delhi in 2006. In this essay, he wrote of the existence of many versions of Ramayana and a few versions that portrayed Rama and Sita as siblings, which contradicts the popular versions of the Ramayana, such as those by Valmiki and Tulsidas.

In 2006, ABVP, the student wing of BJP, opposed the inclusion of this essay, and as a result the academic council of the university scraped it off the syllabus. This, despite the fact that a committee of history experts voted 3-1 in favour of keeping it in the course.

7. He suggested that the *Mahabharata* claims that Brahmins in the past ate beef. He received threatening phone calls, and a free ticket to Pakistan from "NaMo Brigade".

U.R. Ananthamurthy, scholar and Padma Bhushan winner

In 2013, Jnanpith Award and Padma Bhushan winner, U.R. Ananthamurthy said that there's a reference of Brahmins eating beef in the *Mahabharata*. This drew flak from many right wing groups. A lifelong critic of the RSS, and no stranger to threatening calls, Ananthamurthy also claimed that he wouldn't live in a country ruled by BJP leader Narendra Modi. He later clarified that those remarks were made when he was "overcome by emotion" and said that he had no such plan, though he continued to oppose BJP.

He passed away on August 22nd, 2014. Hearing the news of his death, many workers of right wing parties celebrated it with fireworks.

8. She criticized Islam. Was living in exile in India but had to leave for the US after receiving threats from Islamic radicals.

Taslima Nasreen, author and feminist

Yes, we know Taslima Nasreen isn't Indian, but she had been living in Kolkata and New Delhi in exile from her native Bangladesh. The reason? The views expressed in her book *Lajja* (Shame) were considered to be un-Islamic and too radical. Naturally, she had to leave Bangladesh. But what's even more worrisome is that after staying for a long time in India, she had to leave this country too, owing to the pressure state governments faced from Islamic fundamentalists. As of 2015, she's been living in the US.

9. He wrote a book that offended radical Muslims. A fatwa for his assassination was announced. His Jaipur Lit Fest appearance was dropped from the schedule in 2012.

Salman Rushdie, Booker Prize winning novelist

British-Indian essayist, novelist and Booker Prize winner, Salman Rushdie had a fatwa issued against his name by the Ayatollah of Iran in 1989, following the release of his book *The Satanic Verses*

(officially banned in India). Ever since, radical Islamists have been vying for his blood. Even though Rushdie has made a few appearances in India, during the 2012 Jaipur Literature Festival, he was forced to cancel his appearance and the subsequent India tour, citing security reasons.

These examples are not just attacks on any one or two individuals but an attack on reason altogether. The question isn't what's outrageous or what's hurting, because that's subjective, but the question is - why do we react to differing opinions with violence?

Article 19 of the Indian Constitution gives all citizens the right to freedom of speech and expression but subject to "reasonable restrictions" for preserving "public order, decency or morality".

But all these three aforementioned things are plainly subjective. Using this, many writers, scholars, rationalists have been silenced and threatened. For how long? As a secular country, we should have been a society that knows how to separate the state and the religion; we should have known how to uphold the rights of the individual before pandering to any or one religious group.

Instead, we've turned into a society that is scared of 'offending' anyone. If you're pro-freedom of speech, you need to understand that it comes with the knowledge that some people, somewhere will always get offended or hurt. They are free to make their counter arguments and engage in debate, but no one has the right to react with violence.

Until we learn that, India shall remain a dark place for rationalists.

<https://www.scoopwhoop.com/inothernews/no-country-for-rationalist-people/#.i5p80ng53>

■■■

Many of us saw religion as harmless nonsense. Beliefs might lack all supporting evidence but, we thought, if people needed a crutch for consolation, where's the harm? September 11th changed all that.

Richard Dawkins

Religious fanatics want people to switch off their own minds, ignore the evidence, and blindly follow a holy book based upon private 'revelation'.

Richard Dawkins

My eyes are constantly wide open to the extraordinary fact of existence. Not just human existence, but the existence of life and how this breathtakingly powerful process, which is natural selection, has managed to take the very simple facts of physics and chemistry and build them up to redwood trees and humans.

Richard Dawkins

An Official Journal of Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samitee, India

THOUGHT & ACTION

Committed to Build Rationalist Society

Issue - 1



Vol - 17

Apr - Jun 2017

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Founder
Dr. Narendra Dabholkar
(1945-2013)

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How long should we wait for the arrest of the suspected assassins?

Two years have passed since the brutal murder of Comrade Panasare and 42 months after killing Dr. Dabholkar. The two independent agencies involved in the investigation, viz, CBI of Central Government and SIT of State Government have lodged a criminal case on Sanatan Sanstha and Virendra Tawade of Hindu Jan Jagran Samiti. In both the charge sheets of murder, the names of Sarang Akolkar and Vinay Pawar of Sanatan Sanstha have been mentioned with supporting documents and evidences. Both the Agencies have come to this conclusion independently before lodging charge sheets in the Court. This appears to be very serious matter. In fact Sarang Akolkar, a wanted criminal by NIA, has been served with red corner notice at Interpol in the past. With these proven records, Avinash Patil of Maharashtra ANIS, through the press note, is questioning exasperatingly when will the Government arrest Sarang Akolkar and Vinay Pawar of Sanatan Sanstha?

The press note also points out that Sarang Akolkar and Vinay Pawar are absconded criminals of 2009 Malegao Bomb Blast Case for last seven years. In fact there was no criminal record of Vinay Pawar. Even then he has absconded since the explosion. Hence Maharashtra ANIS demands a quick action for serving a fresh red corner alert notice against these two criminals and announce an award of Rs 25 lakhs to the informers of their whereabouts. The charge sheet also mentions that there was a difference in thinking which has lead to assassinate Dr Dabholkar and Comrade Panasare. This appears to be a very severe conclusion inferred by the agencies.

The documents found by the agencies with these suspects contain false accusations on Dr Dabholkar and Comrade Pansare, some malicious writings and a list of activists and progressive thinkers of Maharashtra. Maharashtra ANIS is insisting that Government should initiate action to give protection to the persons whose names appear in the hit list. The note also states that no person will be safe until and unless Sarang Akolkar, Vinay Pawar and remaining three absconded Sadhak, viz; Pravin Limakar, RudraPatil and Jayaprakash Hegade are put behind the bar. As such they should be arrested without much delay.

In one of the public litigation applications, the High Court has ordered the Government to state their stand on banning the activities of Sanatan Sastha. Central Government has taken a stand that State Government had not provided sufficient evidence to ban these organisations. However, the State Police Department had filed a separate charge sheet against Sanatan Sanstha. Even CBI also filed a case in similar manner. The Court has already given a severe punishment to Vikram Bhawe and

Ramesh Gadkari, both Sadhak of Sanatan Sanstha involved in Thane and Vashi bomb blast cases. The investigating agency of State Government had found sufficient quantity of mind altering medicine in their stock during the raid on Sanatan Sanstha and found that Sanstha used to prescribe these medicines to Sadhak on regular basis. As such the press note insists that the Government should clarify their stand at the earliest.

The press note further mentions that on 16 Feb, Maharashtra ANiS and likeminded organisations in Delhi are organising picketing insisting to arrest the suspected assassins of Dr Dabholkar and Comrade Panasare. The press note further states that the branches of MAHARASHTRA ANIS are organising demonstrations all over Maharashtra insisting that the photographs of suspected assassins to be circulated through all the media.

■■■

Sanatan head questioned in Pansare murder case

Alka Dhupkar

The Kolhapur police team investigating the murder of rationalist Govind Pansare has reportedly questioned Dr Jayant Athavale, the founder of Sanatan Sanstha, in a major development in the case.

The grilling took place this week at the ultra-right-wing group's headquarters in Ramnathi, Goa, Mirror has learned. To avoid any drama or ruckus by his supporters, three officers dressed in plain clothes went to the ashram and recorded 75-yearold Athavale's statement.

This is the first time he has been formally quizzed in connection with the 2015 fatal shooting of Pansare. A man linked to the Sanstha, Dr Virendra Tawde, is the prime accused in the case and is in custody.

Police sources claimed Tawde and the wanted suspects who shot dead Pansare were acting on Athavale's orders. "Unlike the common perception that Dr Athavale is living a retired life, he is very much active," a source said, without elaborating. Lawyer Sanjeev Punalekar, who represents the Sanstha, said several people were quizzed at the ashram, but refused to confirm whether Athavale was among them. "Yes, three members of the Special Investigation Team made enquiries at the ashram on Tuesday and Wednesday. They made enquiries with a large number of people and might have recorded their statements. I have not spoken with Dr Athavale for months so I have no idea if he was interrogated. I cannot speak on his behalf."

Suhail Sharma, additional police superintendent (Kolhapur) led the three-member team. He could not be reached for a comment on Wednesday. The other two officers, assistant inspector Ramesh Khune and subinspector Ramesh Dhane, were also unavailable.

Apart from Athavale's, the team is believed to have recorded statements of Sanstha followers and trustees who live at the Goa ashram.

Pansare was killed near his house in Kolhapur on February 15 last year. Investigators, from the SIT and the CBI, believe the same set of right-wing elements were behind his murder and the killings of rationalist Narendra Dabholkar and prominent activist MM Kalburgi.

On September 5 last year, the Kolhapur SIT raided the Sanstha's Panvel ashram, where Tawde was a regular visitor, and seized a large quantity of psychotropic drugs. There is suspicion that Tawde and other sadhaks were given mind-altering pills at the Sanstha's ashrams. Medical experts say if such drugs are given to people who have no apparent condition, it can make them agreeable to new ideas and instructions.

The Sanstha has categorically rejected the claims, but Tawde's estranged wife, Nidhi, has alleged in her statement to the SIT that the two were routinely administered drugs used to treat schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. The couple was apparently told the pills were necessary for the purification of their souls.

Punalekar claimed on Wednesday that the SIT was trying to defame the Sanstha as investigators had failed to conduct a proper probe in Pansare's murder.

Sharma is investigating the case under the supervision of SIT chief Sanjeev Kumar. The team has already filed a chargesheet against Tawde and identified the shooters as Sarang Akolkar (35) and Vinay Pawar (37).

The two suspects are absconding.
<http://mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com/mumbai/cover-story/sanatan-head-questioned-in-pansare-murder-case/articleshow/57419743.cms>

Courtesy: Mumbai Mirror

■■■

Sanatan Sanstha doubts legality of SPP in Pansare murder case

Vijay Chavan

It is distractions galore in the Sanatan Sanstha-Pansare murder case, with the organisation now objecting the appointment of Shivajirao Rane as the special public prosecutor (SPP) by calling it "illegal". The right-wing organisation argued that Rane was appointed as the SPP since September

2016 by the then superintendent of police, Pradeep Deshpande, which is against the law as only home department has the jurisdiction.

In another development, the Mumbai unit of Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Wednesday announced an award of Rs 5 lakh each for information on two absconding Sanatan Sanstha members who have been named as the suspected killers in rationalist-activist Dr Narendra Dabholkar murder case.

About Rane's appointment, Virendra Ichalkaranjikar, representing the Sanatan Sanstha, said, "According to the information gathered after filing an RTI application, the state government has not issued any order of Rane's appointment as the special public prosecutor in the case. The superintendent of police does not have any authority to appoint such a prosecutor in any case."

In reply to the Sanatan's claim, Rane submitted his appointment letter from then SP Deshpande along with a government resolution that permits the SP and the police commissioner to appoint an SPP in any sensational case.

Talking to *Pune Mirror*, Rane said, "The lawyer of Sanatan does not want me to be SPP because of I had taken an objection on sending articles in the jail meant for their members. I have submitted all the relevant proofs before the court." The court will decide the case on the next date on March 16.

Meanwhile, Narendra Dabholkar's son, Hamid, expressed happiness over CBI's anticipatory move in nabbing Sarang Akolkar (35) and Vinay Pawar (37) in the Dabholkar murder case. The family had urged to the Bombay High Court (HC) to publish their photographs in public so that they would be traced. S R Sing, the additional superintendent of CBI in his statement urged people to contact the CBI with any information related to the accused. He also assured that the name of the informer will be kept secret.

<http://mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com/mumbai/crime/sanatan-sanstha-doubts-legality-of-spp-in-pansare-murder-case/articleshow/57424312.cms>

Courtesy: Pune Mirror



The Mistrust of Science

Atul Gawande

(The following was delivered as the commencement address at the California Institute of Technology, on Friday, June 10th 2016).

If this place has done its job—and I suspect it has—you're all scientists now. Sorry, English and history graduates, even you are, too. Science is not a major or a career. It is a commitment to a systematic way of thinking, an allegiance to a way of building knowledge and explaining the universe through testing and factual observation. The thing is, that isn't a normal way of thinking. It is unnatural and counterintuitive. It has to be learned. Scientific explanation stands in contrast to the wisdom of divinity and experience and common sense. Common sense once told us that the sun moves across the sky and that being out in the cold produced colds. But a scientific mind recognized that these intuitions were only hypotheses. They had to be tested.

When I came to college from my Ohio home town, the most intellectually unnerving thing I discovered was how wrong many of my assumptions were about how the world works—whether the natural or the human-made world. I looked to my professors and fellow-students to supply my replacement ideas. Then I returned home with some of those ideas and told my parents everything they'd got wrong (which they just loved). But, even then, I was just replacing one set of received beliefs for another. It took me a long time to recognize the particular mind-set that scientists have. The great physicist Edwin Hubble, speaking at Caltech's commencement in 1938, said a scientist has “a healthy skepticism, suspended judgement, and disciplined imagination”—not only about other people's ideas but also about his or her own. The scientist has an experimental mind, not a litigious one.

As a student, this seemed to me more than a way of thinking. It was a way of being—a weird way of being. You are supposed to have skepticism and imagination, but not too much. You are supposed to suspend judgment, yet exercise it. Ultimately, you hope to observe the world with an open mind, gathering facts and testing your predictions and expectations against them. Then you make up your mind and either affirm or reject the ideas at hand. But you also hope to accept that nothing is ever completely settled, that all knowledge is just probable knowledge. A contradictory piece of evidence can always emerge. Hubble said it best when he said, “The scientist explains the world by successive approximations.”

The scientific orientation has proved immensely powerful. It has allowed us to nearly double our lifespan during the past century, to increase our global abundance, and to deepen our understanding of the nature of the universe. Yet scientific knowledge is not necessarily trusted. Partly, that's because it is incomplete. But even where the knowledge provided by science is overwhelming, people often resist

it—sometimes outright deny it. Many people continue to believe, for instance, despite massive evidence to the contrary, that childhood vaccines cause autism (they do not); that people are safer owning a gun (they are not); that genetically modified crops are harmful (on balance, they have been beneficial); that climate change is not happening (it is).

Vaccine fears, for example, have persisted despite decades of research showing them to be unfounded. Some twenty-five years ago, a statistical analysis suggested a possible association between autism and thimerosal, a preservative used in vaccines to prevent bacterial contamination. The analysis turned out to be flawed, but fears took hold. Scientists then carried out hundreds of studies, and found no link. Still, fears persisted. Countries removed the preservative but experienced no reduction in autism—yet fears grew. A British study claimed a connection between the onset of autism in eight children and the timing of their vaccinations for measles, mumps, and rubella. That paper was retracted due to findings of fraud: the lead author had falsified and misrepresented the data on the children. Repeated efforts to confirm the findings were unsuccessful. Nonetheless, vaccine rates plunged, leading to outbreaks of measles and mumps that, last year, sickened tens of thousands of children across the U.S., Canada, and Europe, and resulted in deaths.

People are prone to resist scientific claims when they clash with intuitive beliefs. They don't see measles or mumps around anymore. They do see children with autism. And they see a mom who says, "My child was perfectly fine until he got a vaccine and became autistic."

Now, you can tell them that correlation is not causation. You can say that children get a vaccine every two to three months for the first couple years of their life, so the onset of any illness is bound to follow vaccination for many kids. You can say that the science shows no connection. But once an idea has got embedded and become widespread, it becomes very difficult to dig it out of people's brains—especially when they do not trust scientific authorities. And we are experiencing a significant decline in trust in scientific authorities.

The sociologist Gordon Gauchat studied U.S. survey data from 1974 to 2010 and found some deeply alarming trends. Despite increasing education levels, the public's trust in the scientific community has been decreasing. This is particularly true among conservatives, even educated conservatives. In 1974, conservatives with college degrees had the highest level of trust in science and the scientific community. Today, they have the lowest.

Today, we have multiple factions putting themselves forward as what Gauchat describes as their own cultural domains, "generating their own knowledge base that is often in conflict with the cultural authority of the scientific community." Some are religious groups (challenging evolution, for instance). Some are industry groups (as with climate skepticism). Others tilt more to the left (such as those that reject the medical establishment). As varied as these groups are, they are all alike in one way. They all harbor sacred beliefs that they do not consider open to question.

To defend those beliefs, few dismiss the authority of science. They dismiss the authority of the scientific community. People don't argue back by claiming divine authority anymore. They argue back by claiming to have the truer scientific authority. It can make matters incredibly confusing. You have to be able to recognize the difference between claims of science and those of pseudoscience.

Science's defenders have identified five hallmark moves of pseudo-scientists. They argue that the scientific consensus emerges from a conspiracy to suppress dissenting views. They produce fake experts, who have views contrary to established knowledge but do not actually have a credible scientific track record. They cherry-pick the data and papers that challenge the dominant view as a means of discrediting an entire field. They deploy false analogies and other logical fallacies. And they set impossible expectations of research: when scientists produce one level of certainty, the pseudo-scientists insist they achieve another.

It's not that some of these approaches never provide valid arguments. Sometimes an analogy *is* useful, or higher levels of certainty *are* required. But when you see several or all of these tactics deployed, you know that you're not dealing with a scientific claim anymore. Pseudoscience is the form of science without the substance.

The challenge of what to do about this—how to defend science as a more valid approach to explaining the world—has actually been addressed by science itself. Scientists have done experiments. In 2011, two Australian researchers compiled many of the findings in "The Debunking Handbook." The results are sobering. The evidence is that rebutting bad science doesn't work; in fact, it commonly backfires. Describing facts that contradict an unscientific belief actually spreads familiarity with the belief and strengthens the conviction of believers. That's just the way the brain operates; misinformation sticks, in part because it gets incorporated into a person's mental model of how the world works. Stripping out the misinformation therefore fails, because it threatens to leave a painful gap in that mental model—or no model at all.

So, then, what is a science believer to do? Is the future just an unending battle of warring claims? Not necessarily. Emerging from the findings was also evidence that suggested how you might build trust in science. Rebutting bad science may not be effective, but asserting the true facts of good science is. And including the narrative that explains them is even better. You don't focus on what's wrong with the vaccine myths, for instance. Instead, you point out: giving children vaccines has proved far safer than not. How do we know? Because of a massive body of evidence, including the fact that we've tried the alternate experiment before. Between 1989 and 1991, vaccination among poor urban children in the U.S. dropped. And the result was fifty-five thousand cases of measles and a hundred and twenty-three deaths.

The other important thing is to expose the bad science tactics that are being used to mislead people. Bad science has a pattern, and helping people recognize the pattern arms them to come to more scientific beliefs themselves. Having a scientific understanding of the world is fundamentally about

how you judge which information to trust. It doesn't mean poring through the evidence on every question yourself. You can't. Knowledge has become too vast and complex for any one person, scientist or otherwise, to convincingly master more than corners of it.

Few working scientists can give a ground-up explanation of the phenomenon they study; they rely on information and techniques borrowed from other scientists. Knowledge and the virtues of the scientific orientation live far more in the community than the individual. When we talk of a "scientific community," we are pointing to something critical: that advanced science is a social enterprise, characterized by an intricate division of cognitive labor. Individual scientists, no less than the quacks, can be famously bull-headed, overly enamored of pet theories, dismissive of new evidence, and heedless of their fallibility. (Hence Max Planck's observation that science advances one funeral at a time.) But as a community endeavor, it is beautifully self-correcting.

Beautifully organized, however, it is not. Seen up close, the scientific community—with its muddled peer-review process, badly written journal articles, subtly contemptuous letters to the editor, overtly contemptuous subreddit threads, and pompous pronouncements of the academy—looks like a rickety vehicle for getting to truth. Yet the hive mind swarms ever forward. It now advances knowledge in almost every realm of existence—even the humanities, where neuroscience and computerization are shaping understanding of everything from free will to how art and literature have evolved over time.

Today, you become part of the scientific community, arguably the most powerful collective enterprise in human history. In doing so, you also inherit a role in explaining it and helping it reclaim territory of trust at a time when that territory has been shrinking. In my clinic and my work in public health, I regularly encounter people who are deeply skeptical of even the most basic knowledge established by what journalists label "mainstream" science (as if the other thing is anything like science)—whether it's facts about physiology, nutrition, disease, medicines, you name it. The doubting is usually among my most, not least, educated patients. Education may expose people to science, but it has a countervailing effect as well, leading people to be more individualistic and ideological.

The mistake, then, is to believe that the educational credentials you get today give you any special authority on truth. What you have gained is far more important: an understanding of what real truth-seeking looks like. It is the effort not of a single person but of a group of people—the bigger the better—pursuing ideas with curiosity, inquisitiveness, openness, and discipline. as scientists, in other words.

Even more than what you think, how you think matters. The stakes for understanding this could not be higher than they are today, because we are not just battling for what it means to be scientists. We are battling for what it means to be citizens.

<http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-mistrust-of-science>

Courtesy: The New Yorker



First, justify jallikattu?

Sunita Narayan

Now that the dust has settled on Marina beach, where young protesters had camped to demand that the ban on jallikattu—a traditional sport of bull jostling—be lifted, let's discuss the larger and more serious issue of culture, tradition and their practice in the modern world. For a practising environmentalist (like me), this is a contentious and highly polarising issue. There is no doubt that traditional cultures had empathy with ecology—people had learnt to live with nature, optimise its resources and rationalise its use during scarcity. This “sustainable use” was woven into rituals, practices and beliefs, and became part of cultures. But times change, and so do the approaches and sensibilities of society. How do traditions live on? Should they? Or, should the focus be on the reasons why we did what we did, and not on the ritual that has only become symbolic now?

I ask this when the country is learning (and definitely mispronouncing) a new word, jallikattu. The Tamils practise this tradition and say it is different from the bull-fighting of Spain. They do not kill the bull, only play with it by removing bundles of gold and money tied to its horns. The skill is tested in how the man—it's always a man—removes the money and, in the process, tames the raging bull. This is why it is a sport, say animal rights activists, who had successfully taken the issue to the Union government. In 2011, the then environment minister, Jairam Ramesh, agreed to include “bull” in the list of animals that were banned for use in training or exhibition under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PCA) Act, 1960. His successor, Prakash Javadekar, wanted to remove “bulls” from the list but the Supreme Court intervened. In May 2014, the court ruled that jallikattu, bull-racing and other such activities were indeed cruel to animals and upheld the notification banning the “sport”.

But since then, each Pongal—the festival of harvest when jallikattu is organised—the rumble of dissension has been growing. The Union government has kept the fires burning by “promising” amendment to the PCA Act. This year, all hell broke loose as thousands of youth—not illiterate and media-ignored farmers—plugged into social media, spilled onto the beach in Chennai and roads in other cities of Tamil Nadu. The gathering was enough to push the state government to act. Overnight, it promulgated an ordinance and enacted it into a law to ensure that bulls are not barred from being used for rural sport. But the moot question remains—is this an ecologically important tradition or just blood sport?

Proponents say jallikattu is the only way to preserve the state's traditional Kangayam species of bull. They say through this sport, the stud bull's powers are demonstrated and it is selected for conservation.

They go as far as saying that if the sport is banned, there will be no “value” in keeping the bull; it will be slaughtered and the ratio of cow to bull will further decline.

The question is whether this ecological purpose has been understood. The answer is a sad no. First, let's look at the arguments made in the Supreme Court by the state government or even the Union government. The only reason to seek continuation of the sport has been “culture” or “tradition”, and the plea has been that cruelty is not inherent in the sport and can be regulated. The proponents have never ever articulated the ecological purpose of the sport as this would require substantiation.

Then look at the ground facts. Today, indigenous domestic animals across the country stand close to extinction. There is a compelling reason to argue that these species must be conserved, protected and bred. They are local and so, have the ability to cope with adverse ecological conditions. Today, Indian traditional cattle breeds are the basis of economic prosperity in other countries. Africa breeds our Sahiwal; Brazil our Nelore; even the American beef cattle comes from India's Brahman. But we have taken fancy to foreign breeds like Jersey and Holstein Friesian. The 19th Livestock Census released in 2012 shows this decline. Between 2007 and 2012, there was a 19 per cent reduction in indigenous male cattle (bulls) and a parallel 20 per cent increase in exotic breeds of male and female cattle. When compared to the previous census in 2003, the loss is 65 per cent in indigenous milch cattle. The case is the same in Tamil Nadu. So, it would be fair to say there is absolutely no evidence to show that jallikattu has aided in the conservation of indigenous breeds, other than saying that the species that could have gone extinct is surviving by the skin of its horns.

This is not to argue against jallikattu, but to argue that if the tradition has to be kept alive in spirit, then its proponents must muster courage to walk the talk. Much more needs to be done to protect and ensure the continuation and use of indigenous breeds, which are vital for the country's livestock economy. This is where the catch lies. This is the horn that matters.

<http://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/first-justify-jallikattu--56880>

Courtesy: Down To Earth



Some Lessons for the Left

Monobina Gupta

Govind Pansare was not among the nationally well known faces of the Communist Party of India (CPI), even though it was his political home for over six decades. Tragically, it was Pansare's assassination in February 2015 that catapulted the CPI leader to the centre of national discourse. Prior to his murder, not many beyond Maharashtra, where he was based all his life, knew about the richness of his innovative work, his scholarship, and his organic links with the people he spent most of his time with.

Reading Pansare's writings in the recently published book *Words Matter: Writings against Silence*, I wondered why his work did not get the attention it deserves during his life time, even within his own party. These diverse writings – he authored 21 books – clearly distinguish Pansare from run-of-the-mill communist leaders, many of whom despite their ordinariness, have become well known faces representing the party. His relative marginalisation seems to be a consequence of the larger unquestioned practices that have become normal fare in communist parties today.

Pansare, along with M.M. Kalburgi and Narendra Dhabolkar, whose murders captured national headlines, were all rationalists. Given this, it is perhaps not surprising that religion is one arena where his distinctive mode of intellectual inquiry is on full display. In his work, the communist leader reckoned with questions like: how can communist parties – which believe in and practice atheism – reach out to vast numbers of deeply religious people? What kind of popular cultural idioms do they need to evolve that move beyond a 'class only' approach? These are questions that have a direct bearing on contemporary politics in India where aggressive forms of religious fundamentalism have rendered Left-Liberals quite helpless in the political sphere.

While Pansare reflected at length on the complexities of religious and political mobilisation for Left forces in the country, Left parties as a whole shunned deeper intellectual exercises to understand the politics of religion. Instead, the Left parties clung to unchanging formulations year after year, decade after decade. Consider for instance the deadening language of the section on communalism in the CPI-M's organisation report presented at the party's Kolkata plenum in December 2015. Para 1.187 of the document states: "Utilising the intellectuals with us and our contacts with democratic intellectuals and prominent personalities, we should set up joint platforms against communalism. We should use the intellectual resources and the research centres that we have to produce political and ideological material for the campaign against communalism."

These words are typical of the Left's general tendency to reduce its fight against communalism to a string of (failed) electoral strategies. The latest example of this comes from the politically bankrupt and disastrous Left-Congress alliance in the recent elections in Bengal. The language deployed by the Left to wean people away from communalism has been no different from that used by so-called secular parties like the Congress or Samajwadi Party. However, while the latter of these parties has successfully leveraged caste arithmetic in its favour, Left parties have, for too long, been slow to react on that front as well.

In his writings on religion, Pansare seems to ask more interesting questions and spell out potentially more fruitful strategies. For example, he writes: "On the one hand, we should not hesitate to explain religion in a straightforward language. We should note the historical role played by religion, and at the same time explain how the established system has used the miserable and helpless in their place." He goes on to explain how communist parties should deconstruct religion and how it has been used by vested interest groups to acquire power and wealth. "We should not spare any effort in showing how religion has been used by the rulers to further their vested interests and explain this to the exploiters. But we should be sympathetic to those who have fallen victim to religious bigotry."

Delving deeper into the question of communist parties' engagement with people who are religious, Pansare cites Lenin's response to the question of whether believers can be admitted into the party. Lenin was of the opinion that millions of workers, peasants and the poor would stand to be excluded from membership if the party shut its doors on believers. He maintained that his "party is not a debating society between believers and non-believers." It is this deep attention to local conditions, to the intricate histories of caste and religion that appear to set Pansare apart from the most prominent faces of the Left movement today.

In contrast to what is often the Left's dismissive attitude of religion, Pansare emphasises that "revolutionaries" need to intellectually engage with religion: "All the revolutionaries in the world have had to think about religion. They did so by putting in front of them two sections of society. One section is that of oppressors using religion to exploit. The other is that of the exploited and the poor who have taken shelter under religion with false hope."

However, Pansare also argued that to liberate the masses from the clutches of religion, one has to analyse it in specific social contexts. The views revolutionaries have of religion, he writes, "must be based on the social conditions of the time. It may be convenient for those who wish to interpret the world to go on repeating the same views irrespective of time and space. Such a position does not help those who wish to 'change the world.'"

In observing that "religion thus occupies a singular space as far as the scope, depth and continuity of its impact on society is concerned", Pansare seems to suggest that mere sloganeering will not

effectively challenge the increasing politicisation of religion, or wean people away from such a process. The pull of religion is perhaps stronger than most identities. It is not enough to understand religious mobilisation either in purely electoral terms or simply as a subset of questions related to class. The matter is far more complex.

Pansare therefore asks: "What are the reasons for it? No system in society survives without reason. It does not become universal unnecessarily. It does not create hegemony for no reason. There is something in religion that fulfils a social need."

In the chapter introducing him, author and translator Uday Narkar writes that Pansare "was perhaps the only Left leader in Maharashtra who was struggling to engage with the people's imagination." At a time when the masses at large seem disillusioned with dogmatic party line and staid politics, getting back in touch with "the people's imagination" – even if to critically interrogate it – could be well worth the effort.

What Left parties need right now is to revive a culture of intellectual debate – one in which grassroots leaders like Pansare (there surely are many more such invisible and restless party intellectuals away from the glare of publicity) can make a worthy contribution. It is equally necessary for communist parties to make space for dissident opinions on critical subjects like religion and caste rather than penalise them, for the debate to lead to a genuinely different conversation.

<http://thewire.in/50634/govind-pansare-had-some-lessons-for-the-left-if-they-would-only-pay-attention/>

Courtesy: The Wire



EXIT GOD !

Not knowing the causes which shook their land by quakes, ignorant of the laws which caused floods and torrents of rain, thunder and lightening, the early savages attributed mysterious supernatural power to every unexplainable phenomenon. The mystery of life, the mystery of dreams, the mystery of death, and the mystery of phenomena and processes of nature could not be explained with the little knowledge that they had. Biology, Psychology, Organic Chemistry, Astronomy, etc., which explained these phenomena, were not developed then. Hence they had to invent and resort to supernatural powers, "The Gods".

The God concept, for the primitive savage humanity, was only transformation into its opposite, the positive deified interpretation of man's own negative qualities of ignorance and terror, wonder and helplessness, regarding the colossal, un-mastered and un-deciphered phenomena, in the world around him in which he lived....

So the God-concept and Religious ideology were the product of man's ignorance of the natural and social worlds, of man's unawareness of the laws governing the development of these worlds and therefore also man's own development.

Akshayakumar R Desai
(Reason, Jan 1940)

Further Thoughts on Why I Criticize Hinduism

Meera Nanda

Like Manoj and other Indian rationalists, I have often been chided by fellow Indians – fairly mainstream, middle-class *bhadralok*, most of them — for picking on Hinduism. I am asked if I am so concerned about irrationalities and pseudo-sciences, why don't I take on Islam and Christianity? Aren't they full of faith-based nonsense? Hinduism, my critics tell me, is far more rational and "scientific" than these other "Semitic" religions in which you have to take the revelation purely on faith, no questions asked. I am often told rather gleefully that all my labors are wasted because they I am not aiming my rationalism against Christians and Muslims. Some go even further and assume that because I am critical of Hinduism, I must be a secret Christian, and I must be working for "the proselytizers"! Apparently, no one born a Hindu can legitimately raise questions about the "Eternal Truths" of the faith.

On reading Manoj's very cogent defense of why he believes that internal criticism of Hinduism is perfectly legitimate and even necessary, I thought it might be worthwhile to share my own take on it.

Three Caveats

Three caveats must be noticed about the style, intentions and the scope of this book.

The first caveat has to do with the fact that this book deals only with the conflicts between modern science and Hinduism. It does not examine the many flagrant irrationalities and fanaticisms that exist in Islam and Christianity, to say nothing of the many folk expressions of Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism. This exclusive focus on Hinduism is a result of many factors.

First, and most obviously, Hinduism is the religion of the majority; close to 85 percent of Indians describe themselves as Hindus. Secondly, it is a matter of historical fact that the proponents of scientific rationalism in India in the 20th century, whose ideas are explored at length here, came from a Hindu background and were engaged with issues relating to the Hindu metaphysical justifications for caste and gender inequalities. Thirdly, Hinduism has avoided a serious house-cleaning by drawing far-fetched and ad hoc analogies with modern science. It has succeeded in selling itself around the world as the only and the ultimate "religion of reason," while redefining reason itself to conform to the Hindu ideal of spiritual or Gnostic knowledge. Finally, I must acknowledge my own background. My own atheism emerged out of a critical back-and-forth with Hinduism, the faith I was born into, and the faith I took quite earnestly when I was younger. Among all the religions of India, it is the popular Hinduism of Ramayana, Bhagvat Gita and the Puranas that I have a fair amount of first-hand experience of. As an atheist of Hindu origin, and as a secularist concerned with the growth of Hindu nationalist politics, I take a rational critique of Hinduism to be a matter of great urgency.

It is for these reasons that this book is focused on the record of secularization and rationalization – mostly the lack of it – of Hinduism. But this Hindu-centrism should not be read as a back-handed approval of, or partiality for, any other religion. No religious faith is free from highly improbable and objectively false beliefs about matters of empirically verifiable facts. Indian Christians are as fond of their miracles and faith-healing as the devout Hindus who lined up to offer milk to the milk-drinking idols of Ganesha; Indian Muslims can be as literalist in the matter of Koran and Sharia as any Christian fundamentalist anywhere in the world. The principles of scientific rationality cut across all faith traditions and all conceptions of the supernatural, personal or impersonal, one or many, transcendent or immanent. Science is an equal-opportunity debunker, or a broad-spectrum weed-killer, if you will.

But let us weed our own gardens, I say, for those are the gardens and the weeds that we are most familiar with. Even though I have no desire whatsoever to step back into the Hindu garden of my childhood and youth, I insist on weeding it nevertheless, so that others who come after me can live in it (if they still choose to) without losing their minds and their consciences.

The second caveat has to do with the place of religion in social life. This book's plea for combating superstitions and pseudoscience should not be read as a militant rejection of religion per se, even though all religions, without exception, have served as incubators of irrational beliefs. The idea is rather to set limits on what functions religions can legitimately perform in the 21st century. Applying critical inquiry to religious doctrines means only this: Insofar as religions invoke supernatural forces (whether a personal God or the impersonal but conscious shakti, or spiritual energy) in order to make factual claims about the natural world, they have an obligation to meet the same standards of evidence that apply to scientific explanations in the relevant domain of the natural world. In other words, if religions want to assert factual truths about the universe, or if they want to convince us of the actual existence of the beings and powers they claim exist in the universe, they cannot fall back upon the authority of ancient books or mystical "seers" gifted with divine powers to see what is not perceptible to ordinary mortals. If and when religions step into the turf of natural science and social sciences (including of course, history and archeology) which deal with empirically testable matters, they have to play by the rules of accepted science and adjust their picture of the world accordingly.

But as long as religions refrain from stepping into the turf of science, and learn to interpret the supernatural powers and phenomena as myths, allegories and poetic metaphors, they need not worry about scientific demonstrability, for scientific validity is not the correct criterion for measuring the value of poetry. Religion as hope-renewing poetry, myth or parable has — and perhaps will always have — an important place in the modern world. But religion will have to cede the function of explaining the natural and social world to science.

For many reasons having to do with Hindu theology and India's entanglement in European romantic counter-Enlightenment, this separation between expressive and explanatory functions of religion has been particularly slow in coming in India. Contemporary Hinduism makes a number of factual claims about the cosmological order. A brief list of such claims will include the following: that the entire universe is filled with conscious spiritual energy that animates everything; that a soul capable of conscious awareness and memories can exist apart from the brain and the body; that this soul enters the embryo of a species chosen as a result of the souls' karmic account from the previous birth; that different species of living beings represent different stages of the evolution of the soul; that morally good or bad deeds (punya or papa) from past births influence the innate qualities, gunas or "substance code" of different species, castes and genders that the soul is born into; the macrocosm (planets and stars) corresponds to and influences the microcosm (human affairs) and so on. Whatever else they are, all of them are simultaneously claims about the nature of the material world of particles, bodies, birth and evolution. Because these claims involve the material world, they are open to serious empirical inquiry using the standard methods of modern biology, physics, cosmology and neurobiology of consciousness. All of these claims need to be critically assessed based upon advances in scientific knowledge in these domains.

Avatars of Vishnu

But rather than open its cosmological claims to critical scrutiny – and reject the many falsified elements — modern Hinduism has adopted the strategy of co-opting the vocabulary of modern science to legitimize its spirit-centered worldview. To take just one example, important Hindu philosophers, from Keshub Chandra, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo have interpreted Vishnu's ten avatars as foreshadowing the Darwinian theory of evolution and have interpreted the Hindu idea of the presence of consciousness in nature as an actual component (called "involution") of the process of biological evolution. Rather than provide metaphorical interpretation of the spiritual teachings, neo-Hindu "reformists" have gone out of their way to defend them as if they are condoned by modern science. It is this abuse of modern science to prop up the outdated and objectively false assumptions about this world that is the target of this book.

The final caveat has to do with the use of the word "superstition." This book will use the label "superstition," when warranted, to describe irrational practices that have doctrinal support from religious texts. This term has fallen out of academic favor because it has come to reek of totalitarian persecution of religious believers, Soviet or Chinese style. Calling someone's belief or practice "superstitious" is seen as tantamount to labeling that group deficient in the ability to reason and imposing your own standards of rationality on them: I have personally encountered many otherwise liberal and progressive intellectuals who take umbrage at me referring to elements of popular Hinduism as superstitions. Critics

also point to the utter futility of it all. Don't modern societies create their own superstitions? Isn't it true that societies at the pinnacle of enlightened modernity – not just the US but the more secularized Western Europe as well – remain rife with old and New Age superstitions?

There are good reasons why pseudoscience and superstitions will always be with us for, to quote Carl Sagan:

[Superstitions] speak to powerful emotional needs that science often leaves unfulfilled. it caters to fantasies about personal powers we lack. it offers satisfaction of spiritual hungers, cures for disease, promises that death is not the end. It assures us that ..we are hooked up and tied to the Universe (Sagan, 1995: 14).

But persistence of superstition should be no reason to throw in the towel. On the contrary, persistent fallacies demand equally persistent critique. Indeed, those who rightly object to political persecution of groups marked “superstitious” (the persecution of Falun Gong in China, for example) should welcome open debate and demand for evidence, because debate is the best guarantor of an open society.

What is not acceptable is to sweep superstitions under the rug out of political correctness, for these will come back to haunt us. After all, what is a superstition? In the immortal words of Robert Ingersoll, one of America's best known agnostics:

Superstition is:

- To believe in spite of evidence or without evidence.
- To account for one mystery by another.
- To believe that the world is governed by chance or caprice.
- To disregard the true relation between cause and effect.
- To put thought, intention and design back of nature.
- To believe that mind created and controls matter.
- To believe in force apart from substance, or in substance apart from force.
- To believe in miracles, spells and charms, in dreams and prophecies.
- To believe in the supernatural.

The foundation of superstition is ignorance, the superstructure is faith and the dome is a vain hope. Superstition is the child of ignorance and the mother of misery. (Ingersoll, 1898, emphasis added).

Regardless of the content of the superstition (whether it has to do with astrology and crystals or “higher” more “subtle” readings of quantum physics), what is troubling about superstitions is how these beliefs are arrived at. What is troubling is the tendency to “*believe in spite of [falsifying] evidence or without [affirming or positive] evidence,*” to “*disregard the true relationship between cause and effect,*” and to “*put thought intention and design back in nature.*”

These styles of thinking are always unwholesome and sometimes downright dangerous. Individually and by themselves, they appear to cause no long-lasting harm, apart from the fact that they most often lead to false conclusions. After all, how does it matter if people read their horoscopes, if it brings them some hope in this chaotic and unpredictable world? The same logic applies to belief in miracles and the power of prayers to bring them about: people need consolation and hope.

Ridding the world completely of all irrationalities is a quixotic task, indeed. As long as long as they cause no real harm, one can learn to live with irrationalities of one's fellow citizens. But more often than not, superstitions do real harm. To begin with, they exact a cost from the poorest and the most helpless members of the society who end up wasting scarce resources on charlatans and holy frauds. But what makes superstitious thinking dangerous for the society in the long term is that it cultivates a habit of believing without adequate evidence, of accepting ideas on faith alone. This paves the way for false prophets and dictators.

It is for this reason that secular democracies must learn to balance the freedom of belief with an obligation to constantly push against irrationally held beliefs with demands for evidence that can be systematically tested. There is simply no other option.

<http://nirmukta.com/2008/11/15/further-thoughts-on-why-i-criticize-hinduism/>

Courtesy: Nirmukta

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EXIT GOD !

Man is not a special creature with a special religious stamp from God, but is merely a link in the chain of the evolutionary process of living substances, a higher vertebrate, a species evolved from monkey. Consciousness, intelligence, purposefulness, these are merely the qualities observed in the higher vertebrate, which is equipped with brain.... Consciousness, intelligent, Eatherial , Infinite God is a fancy of human beings who shift their qualities from themselves, deepen and magnify them and further fasten them on the universe and call it God.

Whenever man fails to find out the causes of phenomenon, he at once implants a fictitious cause, God. But slowly and steadily Mr God is driven out from all sectors.

As natural sciences and with them scientific human knowledge develop, as humanity suffering from the present anarchy of social life under private property which baffles it and preserves belief in God, understands also the laws of movement of society and further consciously utilizes these laws to abolish that anarchy, God will be hounded out from place to place and will be finally cornered and caged in one place, in the museum of Antiquity, where he will be exhibited as a fantastic illusion of earlier humanity which was ignorant of the laws of development of society and nature.

Akshayakumar R Desai
(Reason, Jan 1940)

Gandhi for our troubled times

Ramin Jahanbegloo

I once asked my students at Jindal Global University about Mahatma Gandhi's relevance in today's India. "Gandhi is only a name and an image in India today," they commented coldly, as if I had been taken in by a romantic view of India which lived the Gandhian non-violence as a Utopian dream far from the harsh reality of the everyday life of Indians.

This may be true, I thought. Yet, even if there is an ounce of truth in this argument, we need to be reminded that Gandhi has been more appreciated, read and practiced seriously outside India than among the last two generations of Indians. Moreover, he remains a towering figure who seems as fascinating as he was when he was assassinated by Nathuram Godse. The impact of his philosophy of non-violence in inspiring leaders of the 20th century such as Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela and Václav Havel is the expression of a momentous mode of political thinking that can be invoked as a Gandhian moment.

Explaining his universal appeal

Therefore, Gandhi's success as a universal gadfly goes far beyond his national stature as the founding father of modern India. As such, his universal message could be measured by his immense impact on all forms of dissent against unjust regimes — this includes India — in the past half-century. As such, Gandhi has become a part of the moral conscience of humanity. His name and achievements symbolise a sense of revolt against injustice. That is to say, a proper appreciation of Gandhi's relevance can only be made against the backdrop of his civic philosophy of dissent. Also, let us not forget that Gandhi's critique of modern civilisation in *Hind Swaraj* is one of the greatest Socratic gestures of intellectual self-examination in the history of modern political thought. It is all the more necessary to point out that Gandhi's critical attitude toward modern civilisation is an effort in asking the right questions at the right time about whole inherited ideas on thought and action. The Gandhian audacity of asking questions on what the western world presents as universal truths is, therefore, tied to a specific historical context in which this self-examination finds its meaning. As such, it happens that Gandhi is a non-professional philosopher who asks philosophical questions and helps us to understand the implications of how these ideas can change the world. In other words, he is a public gadfly who does not conform himself to any orthodoxy, western or Indian.

Such an attitude of mind is represented by Gandhi's Socratic revolution: self-examination accompanied by a self-transformation of society. Gandhi's legacy also exemplifies another Socratic aspect which is absent among most of the political leaders today: courage. He believed that when

fighting injustice, the actor must not only have the courage of his/her opinions but also be ready to give his/her life for the cause. As writer George Woodcock says, “The idea of perishing for a cause, for other men, for a village even, occurs more frequently in his [Gandhi’s] writings as time goes on. He had always held that satyagraha implied the willingness to accept not only suffering but also death for the sake of a principle.” Gandhi’s dedication to justice in the face of death is an example of his courageous attitude of mind as a Socratic gadfly. Further, one can find in Gandhi a readiness to raise the matter of self-suffering as public policy. He felt an increasing loneliness in the role of the super-satyagrahi which he had assumed. Loneliness is one of the fundamental features of a Socratic gadfly, who is always expected to take a position independent of those in power and sometimes in direct opposition to the opinions of the larger society. As a matter of fact, Gandhi’s moral power, like Socrates’s irony, masks an autonomous individual who is often lonely because of his attentiveness to the moral disquiet within him. Gandhi’s nobility of spirit in the face of populism is a timely reminder of how imaginatively the act of dissent can become a way of questioning, changing the world as well as oneself.

A vision by creating possibilities

When confronted by mobs or public authority, Gandhi did not adopt a policy of self-censorship. He had no fear of the power of the state or of a tyrannical crowd. It is this state of mind which we can find as the underlying motto of Gandhi’s political and intellectual life. Gandhi had no tragic sense of politics, but he knew which battles to fight and which ones to let go. In the manner of Socrates, he was aware of the fact that philosophy and the city need each other and benefit each other, even if there is a distinction between the concerned and critical gadfly and those playing a role to preserve a corrupted power. That is why, for both Socrates and Gandhi, the process of dialogue and ceaseless questioning is considered as the most dissenting and productive thinking of gadflies in the public space. As such, Gandhi was able to define a new vision of independent India — not by a nostalgic return to the past, but by creating the possibilities of a critical public culture in India.

The idea of struggling for truth and resisting evil, after all, provides us with one of the most brilliant examples of Gandhian critical thinking and public questioning. Questioning in this context is the non-violent process of speaking up against power while withstanding tyranny and silencing. In other words, Gandhi’s main concern is not with ahimsa as kindness and gentleness. He is talking of non-violence as a brave act of dissent. “My non-violence is not merely kindness to all living creatures,” wrote Gandhi in his journal *Harijan*. “Ahimsa is the highest ideal. It is meant for the brave, never for the cowardly. To benefit by others’ killing and delude oneself into the belief that one is being very religious and non-violent is sheer self-deception.” As a matter of fact, taking into consideration Gandhi’s life, Satyagraha rests on a philosophical belief that non-violence is a struggle against wickedness and hypocrisy. Moreover, it is the highest form of moral intervention against falsehood and injustice in the public space.

Leadership as a true form

Therefore, more than just being a historical moment, questions which were addressed by Mahatma Gandhi to his contemporaries find their full relevance in our times of political populism and moral hypocrisy. Though Gandhi propounded no Platonic or Machiavellian theories of political leadership, he personified a moral and dialogical leadership behaviour widely acknowledged as a true form of interconnectedness and service to others. Undoubtedly, this is the true lesson of Gandhi's political life, where moral conviction and sense of duty to others go hand-in-hand. He strived to live a life in politics which promoted moral values that transcended self-interest and political arrogance. This idea of transformative leadership as an ethic of freedom is a distinctive feature of Gandhi's political philosophy.

As such, in Gandhi's ideal of democracy many of his core beliefs and arguments such as moral growth of the individual, the primacy of the spiritual in non-violent action and the interdependence of all departments of life came together. But how did Gandhi expect these principles to work in everyday life? He had come to the conclusion that democracy, like any other aspect of social and political life, would not function in the framework of a meaningless civilisation with no sense of ethics and spirituality. In other words, his idea of democracy is understood as a means to fulfil one's civic duty as an individual participating in a community and as an end to be attained through moral and political resistance to all forms of centralisation of power.

This is where Gandhi's conception of democracy becomes relevant to us and significant to contemporary democratic theory. Needless to say, Gandhi's approach to politics in terms of "resistance" and "protest" beyond a conception of domination over others provides a potential antidote to the contemporary crisis of democracy. With this in mind, Gandhi can be said to be oriented towards reinventing politics as a capacity for self-realisation and self-transformation of society. Maybe this is why each time I read a page of Gandhi I am tempted to go back to my students and ask them to revisit him as an invaluable thinker and moral guide amid the great political problems and the cultural confusions of India and the world in which we live.

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http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/Gandhi-for-our-troubled-times/article17113240.ece?utm_source=true&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=Newsletter

Courtesy: The Hindu



Two Years of an Ambedkar Bhakt and the Plight of Dalits

Anand Teltumbde

With a self-proclaimed Ambedkar bhakt at the helm of the government, the Dalits might have expected a modicum of directional change in policies towards them. Instead, the two years of Narendra Modi's government have led to a reversal of many of the gains made by the Dalits in the past few decades.

Narendra Modi, the self-proclaimed Ambedkar *bhakt*, has completed two years of his boastful rule. Babasaheb Ambedkar, an iconoclast par excellence, was loath to having bhakts but with characteristic pragmatism, he might just have relented when a Prime Minister announced himself as his bhakt. Ambedkar had made a modest demand for Dalit representation in the state structure. He had hoped that such representatives would safeguard Dalit interests from the majority of the caste Hindus. Ambedkar experienced in his own lifetime the futility of his demand. But with an all-powerful Prime Minister as an Ambedkar bhakt, the Dalits could have expected a change in their state of affairs.

A modicum of expectation that Dalits would have had from an Ambedkar bhakt would have been to turn the country somewhat along the direction prescribed by Ambedkar. It is well known that he had asked the new rulers to bring in social and economic democracy at the earliest. For this purpose, he had provided a vehicle in the form of the Directive Principles. Although not justiciable, they were to be the fundamental principles for governance of the country. But these principles were totally ignored in the 60 years of Congress rule. An Ambedkar bhakt would have been expected to get them back into focus. He was also expected to arrest the worsening conditions of Dalits. Two years may not be a long time to show visible results but certainly enough to mark a directional change. What does the Ambedkar bhakt have to show in these two years?

Rhetoric and Reality

On the eve of the last general elections, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) upstaged the Congress by buying off all the prominent brokers of Dalit votes. This investment paid rich dividends. Enthused by this win, the BJP went full blast in appropriating Ambedkar through a propaganda blitzkrieg and grabbing all possible places where his memorials could be erected. Paradoxically, whatever Ambedkar stood for was being trampled upon with impunity. There was harassment and brutalities unleashed on Dalit students in higher education. There was deliberate delay in scholarships to Dalit students and institutional attempts to smother voices of radicals among them, eventually exposed by the institutional murder of a bright research scholar Rohith Vemula. As such, discrimination is nothing new to Dalits but

the institutional manner in which it has been perpetrated in the past two years is certainly conspicuous. Despite countrywide outrage and struggles for justice to Rohith, Modi continues to back his killers.

Modi swears by the Constitution as his sacred text but in the past two years he has trashed it. He has not only neglected the Directive Principles but has also not hesitated to mutilate them. Leave apart the spirit of the Constitution, its key guiding principles like secularism, equality and liberty have become a travesty in the past two years. The basic principle of “equality before law” in the Constitution, the single biggest constitutional solace for the poor and marginalised, has been almost dismantled as evidenced by the “clean chit” to the Hindutva criminals in Malegaon blast case. Ban on beef eating, *ghar wapsi*, saffronisation of education, jingoist promotion of nationalism/patriotism and irrationality are directly detrimental to the Dalit interests. All these are effective reversals of all gains made by Dalits during the last century.

Deprivation of Dalits

We will see how deprivation of Dalits has increased during Modi’s rule by looking at the budget allocations for two schemes: one, their overall development vide Scheduled Caste Sub Plan (SCSP) and Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) and, two, through the *safai karamchari*-related schemes.

The Constitution recognised the need to close the socio-economic gap between these communities and the rest of the Indian population and mandated special protection and provisions for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. It was actualised in prospective terms only in the Fifth Five Year Plan period in 1974–75 by the policy of the TSP and later in 1979–80 in the Sixth Plan period by the Special Component Plan (SCP), later christened as SCSP. They were the statutory allocations to be made in every budget, central as well as state, to be spent on these communities and were mandated to be budgeted in plan outlays in proportion to the population of the two communities. As in any scheme for Dalits, the government never kept its promise. Most of the funds were diverted to unrelated activities and even then the actual spending was far less than what was budgeted. Even with such misdoings, the allocations by the previous regimes look better than the two budgets (2014–15 being the interim budget) of the Modi government. As **Table 1** shows, for the year 2015–16 the ratio of the SCSP allocation to total plan outlay worked out to just 6.62%, by far the lowest since 2007–08 and that for the TSP at 4.29%, lowest since 2011–12. These ratios should have been 16.62% and 8.6%, respectively, as per their population. Although, in view of the important state elections, these ratios improved slightly in the current budget to 7.06% and 4.36%, respectively, they were lower than the earlier ratios. In these two years Modi has deprived Dalits and tribals of `13,370,127 crore and `5,689,940 crore from their legitimate share.

Table 1: SCSP and TSP Allocations in ₹ Crore

	2007-08 RE	2008-09 RE	2009-10 RE	2010-11 RE	2011-12 RE	2012-13 RE	2013-14 RE	2014-15 RE	2015-16 RE	2016-17 BE
Plan Outlay	1,58,491	1,83,528	2,33,386	2,84,284	3,27,396	4,13,625	4,75,532	4,67,934	4,65,770	5,50,010
SCP/SCSP										
SCP Allocation	12,368	14,727	15,906	23,183	29,918	33,085	35,801	43,208	30,851	38,833
%	7.80	8.02	6.82	8.15	9.14	8.00	7.53	9.23	6.62	7.06
TSP										
TSP Allocation	7,447	8,771	8,600	10,363	17,959	18,721	22,030	26,715	19,980	24,005
%	4.70	4.78	3.68	3.65	5.49	4.53	4.63	5.71	4.29	4.36

Source: Union Budgets 2007-08 to 2016-17.

Safai karamcharis, or manual scavengers, accounting for about 10% of the total Dalit (SC) population, are the Dalit among Dalits (“Dalits Cry on the Eve of the Ambedkar Festival,” EPW, 7 May 2016). Modi’s concern for this section of the population is evidenced by the drop in the allocation for Self Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers from `557 crore in the last two budgets (as **Table 2** shows) to `439.04 crore and `470.19 crore, which were further slashed to a token entry of `10 crore. The allocation for Pre-matric Scholarships to the Children of those Engaged in “Unclean” Occupations shows an even more dismal picture: while the budget allocation was marginally raised to `10 crore from the earlier `9.5 crore, it was slashed to `2 crore in the last budget.

Table 2: Outlays for Safai Karamchari-related Schemes (₹ crore)

	2013-14 BE	2014-15 BE	2014-15 Actual	2015-16 BE	2015-16 RE	2016-17 BE
Self Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers	557.00	439.04	47.00	470.19	10.01	10.00
Pre-matric Scholarships to the Children of those Engaged in “Unclean” Occupations	9.50	10.00	10.00	10.00	2.50	2.00

Source: Union budget for respective years.

Spurt in Caste Atrocities

While the BJP desperately depends upon Dalit votes, its win in the last elections with a clear majority in the Lok Sabha for the first time, coupled with the overbearing style of Modi, has bolstered the entire Sangh Parivar. Its aggressive Hindutva rhetoric generally emboldened the feudal forces and lumpen elements in rural areas to suppress any assertive action by Dalits. Not everyone in the Sangh Parivar internalises the tactical need of the BJP to woo Dalits. Such dynamics have aggravated caste contradictions in villages which often manifest in gory atrocities. While the atrocity graph has been going up since the economic reforms were instituted, the rise during Modi’s rule appears spectacular. The National Crime Records Bureau has only the 2014 atrocity figures, but they might be enough to

reflect the nature of this dynamics. **Table 3** gives a glimpse into the atrocities on Dalits, which shows an alarming increase of over 19% from the previous year.

Table 3: Atrocity on Dalits from 2010 to 2015

Type/Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014*
Murder	570	673	651	676	794
Rape	1,349	1,557	1,576	2,073	2,388
Kidnapping	511	616	490	628	1,456
Dacoity	42	36	27	45	37
Robbery	75	54	40	62	92
Arson	150	169	214	189	201
Grievous hurt	4,376	4,247	3,855	4,901	4,531
PCR Act	143	67	62	62	101
PoA Act	10,513	11,342	12,576	13,975	8,887
Others	14,983	14,958	14,164	16,797	21,541
Total	32,713	33,719	33,655	39,408	47,064
Percentage rise	-	3.08	-0.19	17.04	19.43

* Break-up computed from the figures in Table 7.2, Crime of India 2014.

Source: NCRB, "Crime in India" for various years.

In sum, the two years of Modi have been grossly devastating to Dalits in the short term and utterly ruinous in the long term. Dalits had better realise that the Sangh Parivar's dream of establishing Hindu Raj, a curious cross of the Hitlerite *Ein Volk, Ein Reich, Ein Fuehrer* and Manu's Brahmanism, is a deadly antithesis of Ambedkar.

Courtesy: Margin Speak



Cosmic Consciousness and the Ptolemaic Principle

Leonard Mlodinow & Michael Shermer

If you follow the literature of scientific research in medicine, you may have raised your eyebrows at the list of authors credited in an article that came out in the October, 2016, issue of the journal *Scientific Reports*. With the arcane title “Identification of altered metabolomic profiles following a Panchakarma-based Ayurvedic intervention in healthy subjects: the Self-Directed Biological Transformation Initiative (SBTI),” the article named 13 of them. They included Eric Schadt, who founded the Icahn Institute for Genomics and Multiscale Biology at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York, and Harvard professor Rudolph Tanzi, co-discoverer of all three familial early-onset Alzheimer’s disease genes, who is said to be a serious candidate for a Nobel Prize. Seeing names like that on a paper describing serious scientific research wouldn’t budge anyone’s brow, but those who read further down the author list could be excused if they did a double-take: included at the end of the list of accomplished scientists was one Deepak Chopra.

Yes, this Dr. Chopra was indeed the same Dr. Chopra who has on many occasions been roundly criticized in the pages of *Skeptic* magazine, and on many other occasions by those who consider their mission to be that of defending science from myth and misunderstanding. So what to make of this involvement in serious research, and his acceptance by serious researchers? The dictionary defines a skeptic as “a person who maintains a doubting attitude, as toward values, plans, statements, or the character of others.” But a true skeptic doesn’t just challenge the views of others. He or she also challenges the views of him- or herself. And so it was with an open mind that we read *You Are the Universe*, another collaboration between Chopra and a scientist, this time Chapman University physicist Menas Kafatos. In the book, the authors offer what they purport to be a scientific argument for what they call the “participatory universe,” the proposition that the universe and human consciousness are inextricably linked.

The message of their book is encapsulated in their title. The assertion means that we humans, or we who are conscious beings, are significantly intertwined with what physicists call the physical universe, which they assert is “living” and “conscious,” and responds to human minds. That “the universe” affects humans is of course indisputable, but that human existence changes the universe in some significant manner is not an idea most scientists would accept.

This is not a new idea—as the authors point out, it dates back at least to the Vedic sages of ancient India. Those ancient scholars came to their conclusion, the authors tell us, “by diving deep into their own awareness.” In their day, in the search for truth there wasn’t much more one could do but meditate on such problems. Ever since the scientific revolution, however, we have had available powerful tools

for understanding the physical world. As for the mind, “introspection” fell into disuse in the late 19th century as we began to uncover the role of the unconscious, which is inaccessible to introspection. Today, we have powerful brain imaging technologies that more than take up the slack. The authors promise in a sense to update the old Vedic arguments in light of these intellectual advances by employing the ideas and methods of modern science to offer evidence to support their point of view.

The first problem with that promise is that by “support,” the authors don’t mean what scientists usually mean when making that claim about a theory—that it makes predictions that may (or may not) be verified through experiment. Rather, the evidence they propose to offer is that the human universe is better than traditional science at answering nine “ultimate mysteries” offered in the form of chapter title questions: What came before the big bang? Why does the universe fit together so perfectly? Where did time come from? What is the universe made of? Is there design in the universe? Is the quantum world linked to everyday life? Do we live in a conscious universe? How did life first begin? Does the brain create the mind?

If we accept this approach, we face another issue: although some of these mysteries are addressed by science (How did life first begin?), some are not (Why does the universe fit together so perfectly?). Some are even, to a scientist, too vaguely posed to even consider (they ask Do we live in a conscious universe? but provide no clear and verifiable definition of what that means.)

The bulk of the book is a discussion of these nine ultimate mysteries. The objections we just raised aside, in these chapters they generally do a good job of presenting what is known and not known by modern science. The discussion ranges over a wide swath of material, from the intricacies of genetics, to the details of various theories of cosmic inflation. And they rightfully point out some of the limitations of current science. They criticize, for example, the confidence in the validity of string theory that many theoretical physicists hold despite a lack of evidence—a good point. In fact, the large hadron collider in Geneva, where the Higgs boson was discovered, had offered the best and perhaps only (at least for now) possibility of experimental support for the theory, and found none.

And then there is the “fine tuning problem.” That’s the issue that if many of the parameters that appear in our theories are altered by just a percent or so, calculations show that the universe would have evolved quite differently, and in a manner that would not have led to the possibility of life as we know it. That’s not really an issue for physics—the physicist’s job is to figure out and validate the laws, not to worry about what would happen if they were different. But it does present quite a puzzle for the scientific worldview.

The authors also present several phenomena as troubling for science, when in truth they aren’t. They spend much time arguing that something random cannot, without the guidance of a conscious universe, become something “nonrandom.” How could the planet earth, and the life upon it, which is

quite ordered, arise from the chaos of space? The problem is presented as if it stumps scientists, but actually there is an easy answer. The second law of thermodynamics says that the disorder of an isolated system can never decrease, but the earth is *not* isolated. The sun pours energy into it and the earth sends its excess entropy (disorder) into the heavens through the photons that it radiates into space every night, and so its orderliness is not a mystery.

In another criticism of science the authors state that, “to be brutally frank life is a major inconvenience for physics. Biology doesn’t fit into abstract equations.” It’s not clear what the embarrassment is, but in any case, it is not the charge of physics to explain life. Physics is not about biology. There is another science that handles that. It is called...biology. And biology does just fine without abstract equations.

In the era of President Trump and fake news reports it is ironic that the authors offer statements such as “general agreement [in science] is reached by studying the facts and nothing but the facts,” as a criticism rather than a compliment.

When discussing the origins of life, the authors also overlook some interesting recent experiments on the topic, and criticize science for ignoring the question. They present an imaginary molecular biologist who dismisses their ideas with the words, “These kinds of speculations are closer to science fiction than science. They have no evidence to back them up. Sorry.” They imply that the biologist is being closed-minded, but is it closed-minded to reject an idea that is not supported by evidence? In the era of President Trump and fake news reports it is ironic that the authors offer statements such as “general agreement [in science] is reached by studying the facts and nothing but the facts,” as a *criticism* rather than a compliment.

That brings us to what, from a scientific perspective, we consider to be a central weakness of the book: in their search for truth the authors are clearly biased by their agenda to debunk the view that the laws of nature are not driven by some higher purpose. They make little effort to hide this, saying, for example, “We believe that the human universe *must* prevail.” (Italics are theirs.) Elsewhere they write, “It is very hard to get the human mind to accept that absolutely everything in nature is meaningless, but that’s what Darwinism, the big bang, cosmic inflation, and the formation of the solar system are all about—stripping creation of human notions like purpose and meaning.” It is ironic that, with that choice of words, the authors, who are themselves biased, seem to be criticizing science for having an agenda. In truth, however, Darwin and the physicists who developed cosmology were not “all about” creating theories in which deeper human meaning plays no role. Instead, they were led, by their experiments and observation, to discover the laws they formulated. Darwin, in particular, started out a religious man, and created his theory while still believing in the Christian God. His wife was also deeply religious. He would certainly have been more comfortable with a theory of evolution that was consistent with that

belief than one in which randomness plays such a large role. But good scientists don't seek to "prove" pre-existing beliefs, they seek to discover the truth.

The point of view regarding the universe that the authors are promoting is nicely summarized by a series of tenets that Chopra often quotes in his public lectures, interviews, and social media tweets and videos (the authors provide a much longer and detailed list in an appendix to the book):

- Whenever we use the word "we" or "I" it is consciousness that is being referred to.
- Mind/Body/Universe are experiences in consciousness.
- Consciousness is that in which all experience occurs, all experience is known, and out of which all experience is made. It is the knowing element in every experience.
- Fundamental experience is in the form of sensations, images, feelings, thoughts, perceptions.
- Experiences are modifications of consciousness—thoughts and perceptions are modified forms of consciousness.
- You cannot separate an object from the perception of it.
- Consciousness is non local and therefore formless, timeless, and spaceless.
- Humans are a species of consciousness that have created models out of basic experiences or qualia (sensations, images, feelings, thoughts, perceptions).
- The real You is not the Body/Mind/Universe (they go together) but the formless being who experiences Body/Mind/Universe as an intermittent stream of sensations images feelings thoughts perceptions.
- By objectifying experience we created an external world, learned to quantify it, measure it, tabulate it, create phyla, etc., all human constructs around raw experience.
- The goal of existence is to know who we are.
- This understanding and experience could lead to a more peaceful, just, sustainable, healthier, and happier world.

It's hard to argue with such lofty goals. But are we "the universe?" There is very strong evidence that mind and consciousness have nothing to do with the cosmos, but rather are emergent properties of neural activity in the brain. For example, changes in conscious experience can be directly measured by fMRI, EEG, and single-neuron recordings. Neuroscientists can predict human choices from brain scan activity before the subject is even consciously aware of the decisions made. Using brain scans alone, neuroscientists have even been able to reconstruct on a computer screen what someone is seeing. Stroke-caused damage to the visual cortex region called V1 leads to loss of conscious visual perception. Thousands of lab experiments, in conjunction with naturally occurring experiments in the form of brain tumors, strokes, accidents and injuries, confirm the hypothesis that neurochemical processes produce subjective experiences. That is, *brain activity equals consciousness*. The fact that

neuroscientists are not in agreement over which physicalist theory best accounts for mind and consciousness does not mean that alternative theories hold equal standing. And the fact that science doesn't address some question, or hasn't yet found answers to certain ultimate questions, is not "proof" of anything.

You Are the Universe contains uplifting prose that may make the deepest pessimist feel like there is hope for our future, and if you want a single highly readable summation of the worldview that Chopra characterizes as the Eastern Wisdom Traditions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, etc.) and how these relate to modern science, this book should be on your short list. But from a purely scientific perspective we feel that the book's thesis goes against the grain of the *Copernican Principle*. Ever since Copernicus knocked us off our cosmic pedestal half a millennium ago, science has demonstrated that the Earth is not the center of the solar system, the solar system is not the center of our galaxy, our galaxy is not the center of the universe, humans are not specially created apart from all other animals, we are not living in the most important time in history, and we are not the be-all and end-all of creation. *You Are the Universe* seeks to put humans back into prominence. Call it the *Ptolemy Principle*, the belief, after its namesake, that we are not only at the center of the universe, but that we are, in fact, the universe itself!

The fact that science doesn't address some question, or hasn't yet found answers to certain ultimate questions, is not "proof" of anything.

If anything, what science compels us to conclude is that we are not special. In fact, we are just one among perhaps a billion species that evolved over billions of years on one tiny planet among billions of planets circling hundreds of billions of stars in a galaxy that is just one among hundreds of billions of galaxies that, for all we know contain billions of other life forms, all located in an expanding cosmic bubble universe that very possibly is only one among an enormous number of bubble universes. Is it really possible that this entire cosmological multiverse is the result of this one species of conscious creatures? It seems unlikely.

Chopra and Kafatos have made great strides in support of Chopra's quest to apply science to his worldview. The book is a coherent argument for his point of view and it is informed by much knowledge of cutting edge science. Those who are interested in Eastern philosophy will appreciate the arguments. But those who are closer to the outlook of science will likely conclude that the authors have not made their case. We still believe that we are not the universe. But we are optimistic that science can continue to enlighten us about the universe, and everything in it, including us.

http://www.skeptic.com/reading_room/cosmic-consciousness-and-the-ptolemaic-principle/

Courtesy: Skeptic

Carl Sagan on Moving Beyond Us vs. Them

Maria Popova

Unless we are very, very careful,” wrote psychologist-turned-artist Anne Truitt in contemplating compassion and the cure for our chronic self-righteousness, *“we doom each other by holding onto images of one another based on preconceptions that are in turn based on indifference to what is other than ourselves.”* She urged for “the honoring of others in a way that grants them the grace of their own autonomy and allows mutual discovery.” But how are we to find in ourselves the capacity — the willingness — to honor otherness where we see only ignorance and bigotry in beliefs not only diametrically opposed to our own but dangerous to the very fabric of society?

That’s what **Carl Sagan** (November 9, 1934–December 20, 1996) explores with characteristic intelligence and generosity of spirit in the seventeenth chapter of ***The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark*** — the masterwork published shortly before his death, which gave us Sagan on science as a tool of democracy and his indispensable Baloney Detection Kit.

Sagan considers how we can bridge conviction and compassion in dealing with those who disagree with and even attack our beliefs. Although he addresses the particular problems of pseudoscience and superstition, his elegant and empathetic argument applies to any form of ignorance and bigotry. He explores how we can remain sure-footed and rooted in truth and reason when confronted with such dangerous ideologies, but also have a humane and compassionate intention to understand the deeper fears and anxieties out of which such unreasonable beliefs arise in those who hold them

He writes:

“When we are asked to swear in American courts of law — that we will tell “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth” — we are being asked the impossible. It is simply beyond our powers. Our memories are fallible; even scientific truth is merely an approximation; and we are ignorant about nearly the entire Universe...

If it is to be applied consistently, science imposes, in exchange for its manifold gifts, a certain onerous burden: We are enjoined, no matter how uncomfortable it might be, to consider *ourselves* and our cultural institutions scientifically — not to accept uncritically whatever we’re told; to surmount as best we can our hopes, conceits, and unexamined beliefs; to view ourselves as we really are... Because its explanatory power is so great, once you get the hang of scientific reasoning you’re eager to apply it everywhere. However, in the course of looking deeply within ourselves, we may challenge notions that give comfort before the terrors of the world.”

Sagan notes that all of us are deeply attached to and even defined by our beliefs, for they define our reality and are thus elemental to our very selves, so any challenge to our core beliefs tends to feel like a

personal attack. This is equally true of ourselves as it is of those who hold opposing beliefs — such is the human condition. He considers how we can reconcile our sense of intellectual righteousness with our human fallibility:

“In the way that skepticism is sometimes applied to issues of public concern, there is a tendency to belittle, to condescend, to ignore the fact that, deluded or not, supporters of superstition and pseudoscience are human beings with real feelings, who, like the skeptics, are trying to figure out how the world works and what our role in it might be. Their motives are in many cases consonant with science. If their culture has not given them all the tools they need to pursue this great quest, let us temper our criticism with kindness. None of us comes fully equipped.”

But kindness, Sagan cautions, doesn’t mean assent — there are instances, like when we are faced with bigotry and hate speech, in which we absolutely must confront and critique these harmful beliefs, for “every silent assent will encourage [the person] next time, and every vigorous dissent will cause him next time to think twice.” He writes:

If we offer too much silent assent about [ignorance] — even when it seems to be doing a little good — we abet a general climate in which skepticism is considered impolite, science tiresome, and rigorous thinking somehow stuffy and inappropriate. Figuring out a prudent balance takes wisdom.

The greatest detriment to reason, Sagan argues, is that we let our reasonable and righteous convictions slip into self-righteousness, that deadly force of polarization:

The chief deficiency I see in the skeptical movement is in its polarization: Us vs. Them — the sense that we have a monopoly on the truth; that those other people who believe in all these stupid doctrines are morons; that if you’re sensible, you’ll listen to us; and if not, you’re beyond redemption. This is unconstructive... Whereas, a compassionate approach that from the beginning acknowledges the human roots of pseudoscience and superstition might be much more widely accepted. If we understand this, then of course we feel the uncertainty and pain of the abductees, or those who dare not leave home without consulting their horoscopes, or those who pin their hopes on crystals from Atlantis.

Or, say, those who vote for a racist, sexist, homophobic, misogynistic, climate-change-denying political leader.

Sagan’s central point is that we humans — all of us — are greatly perturbed by fear, anxiety, and uncertainty, and in seeking to becalm ourselves, we sometimes anchor ourselves to irrational and ignorant ideologies that offer certitude and stability, however illusory. In understanding those who succumb to such false refuges, Sagan calls for “compassion for kindred spirits in a common quest.” Echoing 21-year-old Hillary Rodham’s precocious assertion that “we are all of us exploring a world that none of us understand,” he argues that the dangerous beliefs of ignorance arise from “the feeling of powerlessness in a complex, troublesome and unpredictable world.”

In envisioning a society capable of cultivating both critical thinking and kindness, Sagan's insistence on the role and responsibility of the media resonates with especial poignancy today:

Both skepticism and wonder are skills that need honing and practice. Their harmonious marriage within the mind of every schoolchild ought to be a principal goal of public education. I'd love to see such a domestic felicity portrayed in the media, television especially: a community of people really working the mix — full of wonder, generously open to every notion, dismissing nothing except for good reason, but at the same time, and as second nature, demanding stringent standards of evidence — and these standards applied with at least as much rigor to what they hold dear as to what they are tempted to reject with impunity.

Courtesy: Brain Pickings Weekly

■■■

Prediction of the future: a big Fraud

Though Spiritualism (of West) has not spread still we are not lacking in other occult “sciences” – fraud would be the right word. Astrology is firmly established. Education has not made a jot of difference. Hindus and Parsees and even some Muslims, believe in and cannot do without the horoscope. It is consulted on every occasion, be it a marriage, be it the launching of a new business and even be it a thread or a Navjote ceremony. I ask you has it made the least difference in the ultimate results of these undertakings? Are all marriages happy, all businesses successful, all children ideal? The answer is plainly “no” and what is more the percentage of successes is not more or here than any other part of the world. Then why consult a horoscope? If the horoscope only tells you of events that are to come in your life, events that you cannot avoid, events good or bad, that will happen in spite of you, then why waste money on preparing a horoscope, why waste space in storing pages with figures that are meaningless as abstruse? If the foreknowledge of good things is to brighten our lives, similar knowledge of disappointments will damp our enthusiasm and, generally, it is easier to be depressed than gay.

If the horoscope is to be drawn up from the position of the celestial bodies, you can imagine the accuracy of a statement that is based on wrong timing. Yet judges, professors, lawyers and doctors, leaving aside the mill-hands and the roadside coolies, all believe in these horoscopes to act against their directions! !

When common law has provision for burglars and those that commit breach of trust why is it that all these swindlers who tell your fortunes, read your palms, prepare talismans, write horoscopes, and umpteen other things for which they have no qualification, allowed to go scot-free?

Ali Akbar
(Reason, Feb 1940)

What is our Nationality: Indian or Hindu?

Ram Puniyani

Debate around the words Hindu, Hinduism, Hindutva is not new. Recently the assertion by Mohan Bhagwat, the Sarsanghchak (Supreme Dictator) of RSS that 'everyone living in India is Hindu' and that Muslims might be Muslim by religion but they are Hindus by nationality', is yet another interpretation of Word Hindu. He said that this is Hindustan so all those living here are Hindu. Both these, Hindu is a nationality and we are Hindustan are erroneous formulations in today's context and need to be examined from the point of view of Indian Constitution.

Bhagwat at times says that Muslim's way of worship-faith might have changed but their Nationality remains Hindu! Over nearly two decades ago when Murli Manohar Joshi, was the President of BJP, he had stated that we are all Hindus, Muslims are Ahmadiyya Hindus and Christians are Christi Hindus. These statements are part of the newer formulation of RSS which in a way are in tune with the ideology of RSS, which regards India as a Hindu nation. Their earlier ideologues had a different take on the issue.

Their current formulation is based on the confusion about the word Hindustan. Simply put the RSS ideologues state that this country is Hindustan, as all people living here are Hindus. This is a circular argument. The word Hindustan needs to be re-examined in today's context as many words keep changing their usage historically. One knows that the word Hindu is not there in Holy Hindu scriptures. The word Hindu was coined by those coming from Western Asia. They identified this land in the name of the river Sindhu. They use the word H more often than the word S, so Sindhu became Hindu. The word Hindu thus begins as a geographical category. Built around this; the word Hindusthan comes up, the land on East of river Sindhu.

The religious traditions prevalent in this part of the World were multiple and diverse. Unlike in Islam and Christianity Hinduism has no prophet. Origin of the diverse traditions here are of local origin. In due course the word Hindu came to be used for conglomeration of diverse religious traditions prevalent here, and these traditions were lumped together as Hinduism. Within Hinduism there are two major types of traditions, the dominant Brahmanical one and the Shamanic traditions, like Nath, Tantra, Bhakti, Shaiva and Siddhanta. During colonial period the identity of Hinduism was constructed more around Brahmanical norms.

This historical identification of our region as Hindustan was not around religion, but around geographical area, Hind-Hindu. The confusion is due to the fact that same word Hindu was initially used for the 'area' and then for religious traditions. Today the word Hindustan is not appropriate, as per the

Indian Constitution and as per the global recognition now we are India not Hindustan. 'India that is Bharat' to be more precise! That's what our Constitution says we are. So what is our Nationality, is it Indian or Hindu? RSS refused to be part of the process of 'India as a nation in the making', it was not a part of freedom movement. The rise of RSS politics came to oppose the concept of India. Concept of India was brought up by the modern sections of society, the industrialists, workers and modern educated classes. This concept had parallel and integrated aspirations of women and Dalits. Here it is important to see that India stands for Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. Hindu nation stands for pre-Modern values in the modern garb. India has the Constitution which recognizes diversity and pluralism. Hindu nation harps back to imaginary glories of the past where birth based hierarchies of caste and gender were the core aspect of social laws. That's how RSS ideologues are uncomfortable with Indian Constitution and always invoke Holy books (i.e. Manusmriti for example) as the model code for current times.

What about the religious minorities, Muslims and Christians being Hindus? As per the founder of Hindutva ideology, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Hindu is one who regards this land from Sindhu to seas as his father land and holy land. In his definition of Hindus, Christians and Muslims are not called Hindus, as per him they have different nationality. The second major Hindutva ideologue Golwalkar also follows this line and in his book 'Bunch of Thoughts', regards Muslims and Christians as 'threat to 'Hindu nation'. It is lately that RSS after gaining political strength wants to assimilate the religious minorities and wants to impose Hindu norms on these minority communities, so the assertion that they may be so and so but their nationality is Hindu. As per the Indian Constitution our nationality is Indian. So the contrast between RSS ideology and ideology of Gandhi, Nehru, Ambedkar and myriad other; who stood for Indian nationalism. Indian Constitution with its libertarian message of justice and equality is in contrast to the injustice inherent in Manu Smriti, the holy Hindu scripture.

To say that Muslims have merely changed their mode of worship is a deliberate move to co-opt them into the fold of Hindu nationalism. Adopting Islam not merely change in ways of worship, it is a faith in a different religion. This can apply to Christianity also. So Muslims have Islam, Christians have Christianity, Hindus have Hinduism, but their nationality is Indian not Hindu. To expect that Muslims will also have Aarti and chant 'Bharat Mata ki Jai' is not as per Indian Constitution. Aarti is a Hindu ritual. If people of different religions wish to adopt the holy rituals of other religions it's their choice. It may relate to Aarti or Namaz or a prayer in Church. But to expect that they should do it; is anti democratic and against the norms of Indian Constitution. Many Muslims do feel that they can bow only to Allah and no other deity, so many of them are opposed to chanting 'Bharat mata ki jai' (Hail mother India), so be it. It's what is in tune with our Constitution.



Chicken-hearted Ghost

Ruskin Bond

During my adult life I have been doing my best to see a ghost, or even feel the presence of a ghostly being; but, apart from hearing about other people's hair-raising experiences, I have never had any supernatural visitations.

So when Roop Singh told me that his wife (who had recently arrived from their village in the mountain fastnesses near Gangotri) was possessed by a ghost or evil spirit, I was delighted. Here, at last, was my chance to experience the real thing.

Our adventure took place in the middle of a stormy night last month. It was raining heavily, but I am a light sleeper, and at about one in the morning I was awakened by Roop Singh calling, 'Sir, sir! Please come!'

I found his wife making strange, mewling sounds, as she moved restlessly around the room, shifting rapidly between door and window. Her hair was loose and there was a wild look in her staring eyes. She seemed totally unaware of my presence.

'The spirit is calling her outside,' said Roop Singh, and whacked her over the head with the flat of his hand. 'That's the only thing that brings her to senses,' he explained.

The girl, now awake, sank down on the cot, sobbing hysterically. 'She's all right now' said Roop Singh, 'But the spirit will return later, and then she'll be up and about again.'

Let's wait and see what happens,' I said.

Soon she began to whimper again. The whimper became muttering. And then she was talking to someone, and it was quite clear that she wasn't talking to either Roop Singh or me.

As Roop Singh raised his heavy hand once more, I said, 'Wait! Hold it!' And dashing upstairs in the rain, I found a little bottle of smelling salt, last opened some ten years ago.

I held the bottle close to the girl's quivering nostrils, her head jerked back, and she was instantly awake.

'Here, you keep it,' I said, presenting the bottle to Roop Singh. 'Whenever the ghost visits her, be sure to use it!'

He's done this ever since, and claims my cure is infallible. But he doesn't accept my theory that his wife is simply a sleepwalker, and a sleep talker. 'We call it a ghost,' he says.

And he may be right. But if ghosts are susceptible to smelling salts, then once again I am disillusioned. I lost my respect for vampires many years ago, when I learnt that they fled from smell of garlic. And now I find that ghosts are equally chicken-hearted. There is no integrity left in the spirit world. Humans are far more frightening.

(Extract from the Book 'Landour Days' by Ruskin Bond and published by Penguin Random House, India)

From the Email Box

Dear Shri Nanavati,

Let me at the outset wish you a very happy new year 2017,

Now about the issue of T&A forwarded by you.

I was quite disappointed by the article on Bhagavad Gita (BG). BG is not a thesis written by somebody to get his/her MA or PhD. Its study needs a different approach. A well argued critique of BG is provided by Amartya Sen in his "Idea of Justice" and Prof Hiriyanna in his "Outlines of Indian Philosophy", Both do not blame BG for contradictions or repetitions because they understand the difficulties in reconciling Niti (the method of justice) and Nyaya (the idea of justice) in the overall context of Mahabharata of which BG is a part.

The whole approach of Ranganath R (the author) is fraught with negativity. He forgets that the central message of BG is Samatva (equanimity) which is not only a state of mind at a particular instance but an entire approach in the form of Niti. In this approach BG's discrete assumption of four-fold divisions is incidental and is offered as a concession to the orthodoxy. It can be easily overturned by a more straightforward interpretation of Samatva which is a natural manifestation of Advaita's Atman=Brahman. BG then easily connects with the preamble principles of secular Indian constitution. (In this context, Babasaheb Ambedkar's critique of BG is quite interesting and well informed though he treats BG as a Brahmanical counter revolution against Buddhism).

I am attaching an appendix from my book "Advaita Vedanta - A Student's Note" which connects BG with quasi-Rawlsian theory of justice - the basis of modern democratic republics. This is to show that even an ordinary liberal atheist can react to the tradition positively by removing the wheat from the chaff. But why to look at the tradition in first place and do this exercise of extracting the contemporary principles?.. Simply because it is impractical to keep aside the tradition or forget the history in its entirety.

I was wondering whether to respond to your perfectly reasonable previous post with which I agree in toto.

However, just to explain what I mean by separation of the wheat from the chaff in this particular context of BG.

The author (Shri Ranganath) says: "Inclusion of verses that are repugnant to human values **even going by old primitive standards** (verses 9.11, 9.32 and 9.33)". His choice of verses and words shows a negative bias.

Here is the English translation of 9.11: "Unaware of my higher state, as the Lord of beings, deluded people disregard me, dwelling in the human form".

What is so repugnant about this? As an atheist I can very well interpret this in a pantheist manner to say.. Lord in its highest (apophatic) nature dwells in all human beings.. (in fact He dwells in all the beings as a Lord of beings). Even if we bring in the Avatar concept, I don't see anything repugnant in this verse although I may not believe in Avatar.

Then 9.32: "For, taking refuge in Me, they also O son of Partha who might be of inferior birth - Women, Vaishya, as well as Shudras - attain the Supreme Goal (moxa)"

Even if we assume that in the karmic framework, BG is calling women, vaishya, and shudra as of inferior birth, all of them are eligible for the Highest Goal without any discrimination. (Incidentally, Gyaneshwar, Madhusudana etc separate Paap Yoni from women, vaishya, and shudras). Thus, in this very life women, vaishyas, and shudras do not face discrimination in respect of the supreme goal.. why should this verse be repugnant even going by the so called old primitive standards?

Same is with 9.33.. As an atheist liberal I do not agree with four-fold division or the concept of God itself, but the purport of BG 9.32-33 is clear.. in respect of the supreme goal it does not discriminate between genders and between classes. Verses 9.32 and 33 are eulogy of Lord and nothing more! By the way, there are many other verse including BG 5.18 which puts Brahmin, dog, pariah, and elephant on the equal footing? (in my appendix attached with the previous post, I have quoted this and many other verses where Krishna is teaching equanimous equality)

Shashikant Padalkar
sspadal@gmail.com

Dear Sri Padalkar Saheb

You may please appreciate the fact that both Sri Ranganath and sri Kumar are highly qualified and belong to highly Orthodox Brahmin Families. Sri Ranganath has read most of the scriptures. You will realise this If you read all the Blogs of Ranganath and Meera Nanda in 'www.nirmukta.com' BG was composed--as some scholars say--by 3 authors. in around 3rd or 4th century AD . Vedic Priests under social & political compulsions { need not be explained here } had to produce a document as a Divine-Decree to enslave the whole society.

If you read BG again & again you will find that no other Divinity --Buddha, Jesus, Prophet Mohamud or Saint Basaveshvara - divided a society. They all spoke of oneness of Humanity

But in BG CHATUR- Varna by Krishna has now become "Thousand Varnas and thousand conflicts. Anyone with some common sense will understand that 9--32 and 33 were meant to declare "Striyo Vaishya thata Shudra" as Papayonees and make them subservient to the supremacy of Brahmins 33 says " Kim punar brahmana punya bhakta rajarsya thata "{ Are they not born to women?} How blessed are brahmins and Kshatriyas is meant to claim exclusivity for themselves,, Having condemned women as papayonis, soon after in 10th chapter he claims that he is the great qualities of 'Stri' 10th chap is nothing but self advertisement which is so ludicrous. We can go on and on. There are contradictions galore--between each verse and between each chapter,. If you read with critical insight you will come across all the absurdities

Regards,

GK Shet Revankar
keshavashet@yahoo.com



Sentiment in Life

There seems to be a curious notion about, that rationalists give no place to sentiment in life. Even people who are more or less acquainted with the rationalist attitude seem to be under this impression. One is not sure in what sense the word is used. These people generally do not feel the necessity of being particular as regards the meaning of the words they use though they demand accuracy on the part of a rationalist. But if by sentiment they mean feelings or emotions the charge is positively ludicrous.

It is certainly not denied that rationalists are human beings and one cannot imagine a human being without feelings or emotions though we are told of a God without body, parts, or passions who is loving and merciful and on His own authority, jealous and vengeful too! Nor can we imagine a person who denies the fact that most of our thoughts and actions are actuated by feelings or emotions.

R D Karve
 (Reason, Feb 1941)

An Official Journal of Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samitee, India

THOUGHT & ACTION

Committed to Build

Rationalist Society

Issue - 2



Vol - 17

Jul – Sep 2017

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Statement of Scientists, Artists and Historians

Statement of Scientists

The scientific community is deeply concerned with the climate of intolerance, and the ways in which science and reason are being eroded in the country. It is the same climate of intolerance, and rejection of reason that has led to the lynching in Dadri of Mohammad Akhlaq Saifi and the assassinations of Dr. M M Kalaburgi, Dr. Narendra Dabholkar and Comrade Govind Pansare. All three fought against superstition and obscurantism to build a scientific temper in our society. Kalaburgi was a renowned scholar and an authority on the Vachana literature associated with the 12th-century reformer Basava, who opposed institutionalised religion, caste and gender discrimination. Similarly, Dabholkar and Pansare promoted scientific temper through their fight against superstition and blind faith.

The Indian Constitution in Article 51 A(h) demands, as a part of the fundamental duties of the citizens, that we “...develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform.” Unfortunately, what we are witnessing instead is the active promotion of irrational and sectarian thought by important functionaries of the government. The writers have shown the way with their protests. We scientists now join our voices to theirs, to assert that the Indian people will not accept such attacks on reason, science and our plural culture. We reject the destructive narrow view of India that seeks to dictate what people will wear, think, eat and who they will love. We appeal to all other sections of society to raise their voice against the assault on reason and scientific temper we are witnessing in India today.

Alladi Sitaram, Ashoke Sen, Ashok Jain, A Gopalakrishnan, D Balasubramanian, Madabusi Raghunathan, P M Bhargava, P Balaram, Satyajit Mayor, Spenta Wadia, A P Balachandran, Vidita Vaidya, Vineeta Bal, Vishal Vasan, Vivek Borkar and more than 90 other scientists

Statement of Artists

The artist community of India stands in firm solidarity with the actions of our writers who have relinquished awards and positions, and spoken up in protest against the alarming rise of intolerance in the country. We condemn and mourn the murders of M M Kalaburgi, Narendra Dabholkar and Govind Pansare, rationalists and freethinkers whose voices have been silenced by right-wing dogmatists but whose “presence” must ignite our resistance to the conditions of hate being generated around us. We will never forget the battle we fought for our pre-eminent artist M F Husain who was hounded out of the country and died in exile. We remember the right-wing invasion and dismantling of freedoms in one of the country’s best known art schools in Baroda. We witness the present government’s appointment of grossly unqualified persons to the Film and Television Institute of India Society and its disregard of the strike by the students. We see a writer like Perumal Murugan being intimidated into declaring his death as a writer, a matter of dire shame in any society. While the Prime Minister of the country has been conspicuously reticent in his response to the recent events, the reactions of ministers in his government reveal their ignorance

and prejudice. Mahesh Sharma, Minister of State for Culture, has made abhorrent comments about mob lynching and murder. His remarks suggesting that writers should stop writing to prove their point are alarming. Arun Jaitley, Minister of Finance, and Information and Broadcasting, has mocked the actions of our respected writers as a manufactured “paper rebellion.” He asks for scrutiny of the political and ideological affiliations of those who are protesting. To these and other such provocations there is a clear answer: while the actual affiliations of the protesting writers and artists, scholars and journalists may be many and varied, their individual and collective voices are gaining cumulative strength. It is this that the ruling party will have to reckon with: the protestors’ declared disaffiliation from a government that encourages marauding outfits to enforce a series of regressive commands in this culturally diverse country. The scale of social violence and fatal assaults on ordinary citizens (as in Dadri, Uttar Pradesh; Udampur, Jammu and Kashmir; Faridabad, Haryana) is escalating. The contemptuous comments about the religious minorities and Dalits made by those within the government confirm that there is little difference between the RSS–BJP mainstream and supposed “fringe” elements. The Sangh Parivar and its Hindutva forces operating through their goon brigades form the support base of this government; they are all complicit in the attempts to impose conformity of thought, belief and practice. The ideology of the ruling party has revealed its contempt for creative and intellectual work; bigotry and censorship will only grow. As in the past, we must challenge the divisive forces through varied forms of appeal and protest, articulation and refusal. Our demand can be nothing less than that the entire range of constitutional rights and freedoms of the citizens of this country — freedom of expression and speech, right to dissent and exert difference in life choices including culture and religion — be ensured. A government that does not tolerate difference, that does not safeguard the lives and interests of its marginalised and vulnerable citizens, loses its legitimacy in a democratic polity. We are facing this situation now, already.

Anjolie Ela Menon, Arpana Caur, Balan Nambiar, Gieve Patel, Gulammohammed Sheikh, K G Subramanyan, Meher Pestonji, Ranjit Hoskote and more than 300 other artists.

Statement of Social Scientists

We, as social scientists, scholars, teachers and concerned citizens, feel extremely concerned about the lynching at Dadri, and the murders of scholars and thinkers like M M Kalaburgi, Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pansare and others, and wish to register our strong protest. We are not just shocked by Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s late response, but also by the implications of the victim-blaming statement he made. To say that “Hindus and Muslims should not fight each other but should fight poverty in-stead” puts the onus for peace and fighting poverty entirely on civil society and communities and absolves the state of any responsibility for both. As Prime Minister, he should have asserted that the state would defend the rule of law. In a country with some 4,693 communities and over 415 living languages, each community is bound to have its own customs, including dietary choices. Individuals may also follow practices different from the ones followed by the majority of their community. Any attempt to impose a uniform belief or practice, on either individuals or

communities, is antithetical to the freedom enshrined in the Constitution. It is the state's responsibility to ensure this freedom.

Achin Vanaik, C Lakshmanan, Gayatri Menon, Johannes Manjrekar, Kalpana Kannabiran, Lakshmi Subramaniam, Meena Radhakrishna, Mritunjoy Mohanty, R Nagaraj, Ravinder Kaur, Sasheej Hegde, T N Madan, Valerian Rodrigues, Virginius Xaxa, Zoya Hasan and more than 200 others.

Statement of Historians

Concerned at the highly vitiated atmosphere prevailing in the country, characterised by various forms of intolerance, we, as academic historians and as responsible citizens of a democracy that has greatly valued its inherited traditions of tolerance, wish to express our anguish and protest about the prevailing conditions. Differences of opinion are being sought to be settled by using physical violence. Arguments are met not with counter-arguments but with bullets. When a poor man is suspected to have kept a food item that certain sections do not approve of, his fate is nothing short of death by lynching. At the launch of a book whose author happens to be from a country disapproved of by certain groups, the organiser is disfigured with ink thrown on his face. And when it is hoped that the head of the government will make a statement about improving the prevailing conditions, he chooses to speak only about general poverty; and it takes the head of the state to make the required reassuring statement, not once but twice. When writer after writer is returning their award of recognition in protest, no comment is made about the conditions that caused the protest; instead the ministers call it a paper revolution and advise the writers to stop writing. This is as good as saying that intellectuals will be silenced if they protest. This is particularly worrying for us as historians as we have already experienced attempts to ban our books and expunge statements of history despite the fact that they are supported by sources and the interpretation is transparent. What the regime seems to want is a kind of legislated history, a manufactured image of the past, glorifying certain aspects of it and denigrating others, with-out any regard for chronology, sources or methods of enquiry that are the building blocks of the edifice of history. We would therefore urge the state to ensure an atmosphere that is conducive to free and fearless expression, security for all sections of society and the safe-guarding of the values and traditions of plurality that India had always cherished in the past. It is easy to trample them down, but it is important to re-member that it will take too long and will be beyond the capacity of those who are currently at the helm of affairs, to rebuild it once it is destroyed.

Romila Thapar, Irfan Habib, M G S Narayanan, K N Panikkar, Y Subbarayalu, B D Chattopadhyaya, D N Jha, B B Chaudhuri, J V Naik, K M Shrimali, Neeladri Bhattacharya, Rajan Gurukkal, A R Venkatachalapathy, and more than 40 other historians

Courtesy: EPW

Sanatan Sanstha

Dhirendra K Jha

Picture a palatial china-white mansion with a massive porch amidst the lush green of a Goan village. Guards in slick blue uniform stand in patrol at its entrance. This is the Sanatan Sanstha's ashram at Ramnathi, where the organization's self-styled 'God', Dr Jayant Balaji Athavale, lives. The three-storey building appears to have been designed to strike awe among the villagers, but it is resentment and revulsion that one sees in their eyes every time you mention the ashram.

Every morning over a hundred visitor's stream in – mostly young men and women in the Sanstha's saffron attire with a vermilion mark on their foreheads. Disciples of Athavale, they stay inside the ashram for the whole day with the permanent residents – who also number around a hundred – and go back to their accommodations outside the village late in the evening.

Across the road, opposite the mansion, a wide open field slopes down to a rivulet that forms the northern boundary of the village. Until recently, the land had yielded bountiful crops every agricultural season. But one day, early in the monsoon of 2008, a powerful stink arose as the logged water receded from the field. 'The smell was so foul that it soon became unbearable. The villagers came out of their houses to an appalling sight – the receded water had left behind hundreds and thousands of used condoms that covered almost the entire field, making it stink like hell,' says Basant Bhatt, the priest of the illustrious Ramnath Temple at the heart of the village. 'No tiller has ever sought to clean the field and cultivate it again.' The locals found it disgusting. Though the source of the condoms remains a mystery, the blame is firmly placed on the ashram.

The villagers probably arrived at that conclusion because Athavale and his saffron-clad followers had been marked by controversy ever since they arrived in 2002. The Sanstha had tried to construct its ashram in the neighbouring village of Parvatiwada two years before their entry into Ramnathi but the locals there were able to mount a successful resistance. 'It was only after their failure in Parvatiwada that they moved on to Ramnathi, where they succeeded in setting up their ashram,' says Sheker Naik, a senior resident of Parvatiwada and a former sarpanch (2002–04) of the Bandora Panchayat to which both villages belong.

Many people in Ramnathi suspected the Sanatan Sanstha of being some kind of sex cult though there was no evidence of that. The condoms in the field, however, confirmed their misgivings even as the Sanstha refuted the allegations. There was, thus, already a good deal of ill-feeling when on the evening of 16 October 2009, a few hours after a bomb blast at Madgaon, the Goa police swooped in on the Sanstha's ashram at Ramnathi.

As per police records, the Sanstha had opposed the Narkasura effigy contest, a hugely popular festive activity in Goa which takes place on the eve of Diwali. On this day in 2009, 16 October, two Sanstha members – Malgonda Patil and Yogesh Naik – were allegedly carrying a bomb on their scooter to plant near the venue of the contest in Madgaon. However, the bomb went off prematurely and the duo died.

‘We were shocked,’ recounts Saurabh Lotlikar, a social worker and a resident of Ramnathi. ‘That very day some of the villagers got together and formed a public interest group, Jan Jagruti Manch, with Basant Bhatt as the president and Sheker Naik the secretary. Its sole objective was to fight for the removal of the Sanatan Sanstha from the village.’

The new group called a meeting the very next day. Only a handful of locals participated. ‘But we persisted, and day after day the knot of people around us grew bigger. Then we called a public meeting on 20 October. That meeting was massive. People not just from Ramnathi but from the entire Ponda subdivision turned up in large numbers,’ says Basant Bhatt. ‘We did not expect more than three or four hundred people, but nearly two thousand participated. Later we also organized a march against the Sanatan Sanstha and that, too, was attended by a large number of people.’

(Excerpts from the Book,

Shadow Armies: Fringe Organizations and Foot soldiers of Hindutva)



Rational Thinking

It is surprising to see how few people are capable of rational thought. To some, however, it seems to come naturally, without the slightest effort and these few are not necessarily trained in logic, and sometimes they have not even an education to speak of. After all logic is based on accepted rules of rational thinking, as grammar is based on accepted rules of language. That is why one sometimes finds absolutely uneducated people who are very quick to see fault in argument and will stop you at once if you make an illogical remark. One of our foremost Marathi novelists, has made a village blacksmith an atheist. Unobservant readers are surprised and ask him, “How can an uneducated villager will be an atheist?” His reply is that he has seen some.

I think believers might credit even atheists with sense enough to know that their non-belief in a future life would certainly not abolish a future life, if there was a future life. If a man had the slightest doubt about the existence of future life, he would not dare to be an atheist. He would rather err on the life, considering the supposed consequences of a mistake on the other side! It is only the person who is thoroughly convinced that there cannot be any such thing as a god or a future to himself. Now is such a person likely to lead a life of “pleasure”? Obviously there is nothing wrong in pleasure as such.

R.D. Karve
“Reason”, Aug 1940

Book Review:***Shadow Armies: Fringe Organizations and Foot soldiers of Hindutva*****A timely book that explains the meteoric rise of Hindutva in India***Mahtab Alam*

Cliches apart, there could not have been a more timely book than *Shadow Armies: Fringe Organizations and Foot Soldiers of Hindutva*. It puts all the things happening in Indian politics in to perspective. Bit by bit, it explains the reasons behind the rise and rise of Hindutva politics over the years, with all its landmark victories as well as contradictions and intra- and inter-organisational conflicts.

It ably traces the trajectories of Hindutva outfits across the country. The chaotic anti-minority and secular environment in its crude form, as we are witnessing today, is the result of a concentrated effort of several decades.

In this book Dharendra K Jha profiles eight organisations, directly and indirectly, linked to the fountain head of Hindutva in India, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The senior journalist had earlier co-authored the critically acclaimed *Ayodhya: The Dark Night – The secret history of Rama's appearance in Babari Masjid*.

These organisations are, Bajrang Dal, Rashtriya Sikh Sangat, Bhonsala Military School, Hindu Aikya Vedi, Sri Ram Sene, Sanatan Sanshta, Hindu Yuva Vahini and Abhinav Bharat. While first four directly work under the direct supervision of the Sangh Parivar, a loose yet a formal network of sorts of Hindutva outfits. The latter four operate independently. However, what is important to remember is that they don't have different goals. One thing which comes out very clearly from the study of these organisations is that they might have different shades, often seemingly contradictory to each other, but their roots and ultimate goals are same. At the end of the day, they all serve the Hindutva ideology.

All for one & one for all: The Hindutva logic

"Some of the 'fringe organisations' seem to exist outside the purview of the Sangh Parivar in so far as they are not technically created and controlled by the RSS. Prominent among them are the Sanatan Sanstha, the Hindu Yuva Vahini, the Ram Sene and the Abhinav Bharat. Yet they are not entirely autonomous. Most of them have an umbilical cord attached to the Sangh Parivar, and all of them are ideologically on the same page. Like the RSS and its affiliates, they claim to derive their ideological raison d'etre from VD Savarkar's Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?" notes Jha.

He also notes, or rather, confesses, "For a long time, I thought they primarily act as recruiting and training centers for their brethren who officially practice politics. This was because I looked at them through the prism of pan-Indian Hindutva organisations like the RSS, the BJP and the VHP. It

struck me only when I began to travel for research and talk to people that these fringe organisations could have their own paths of evolution, beset by internal contradictions and driven by local anxieties and motivations.” The rise and fall of the Ram Sene is the best example of it.

The making of Ram Sene, Jha’s research reveals, was a coming together of people sidelined by the Sangh Parivar, namely the Bajrang Dal. According to the author, while Pramod Muthalik, the face of Ram Sene came because of a highly personalised fight within the Parivar, his henchmen (mostly belonging to the backward castes) such as Praveen Walke, Arun Kumar Puttila, Prasad Attavar, Anand Shetty and Subhash Padil joined it due to resentment, given the brahminical dominance of the RSS and BJP.

“Till 2004 we didn’t feel any brazen discrimination on caste lines,” Jha quotes Walke, who was at that time the state convener of Bajrang Dal. “But once the Assembly election results that year showed the task was complete,” said Walke stating that “caste became our handicap in the organisation which keeps all its important positions reserved for brahmins”. The chapter on the Ram Sene also ably demonstrates insecurities and vulnerabilities of foot soldiers of Hindutva.

The Bajrang Dal chapter

There is a fascinating story about the Bajrang Dal, explaining its political economy in the city of Mangalore, arguably the biggest urban centre of Hindutva politics, not just in Karnataka but the whole of south India. Jha shares with us a telling story of Sharan Pampwell, the Mangalore-based leader of Bajrang Dal and the proprietor of Eshwari Manpower Solutions Limited.

“Like a good entrepreneur – obeying the laws of demand and supply – he has put to good use the anxiety felt by local businessmen as a direct result of the Bajrang Dal’s activities,” writes Jha. “He offers them protection by using the foot soldiers of the very same Hindutva outfit he represents. The enterprise he has reared thus works both ways; the businessmen get security from the Bajrang Dal, and the Bajrang Dal activists benefit from regular employment in the establishment rendered venerable by their own acts of violence and hooliganism” he explains. Predictably, most of his clients are Muslim, the prime target of Bajrang Dal. “Given the kind of activities they (the Bajrang Dal members) indulge in, this is the best way to do your business peacefully,” Jha quotes a Muslim shop owner, explaining the rationale.

The unabashed rise of Yogi Adityanath

The story of Hindu Yuva Vahini (HYV), which was led by the current Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Adityanath, deserves special attention. His steady rise is a direct result of the success of HYV’s ground work in the state, especially in its eastern parts. “Right from its inception, the HYV ran an aggressively toxic campaign into full-blown communal wars and projecting minorities as the enemies of Hindus. It constantly sought to create a fear psychosis by emphasising ‘love jihad’, the meat-eating ‘habits’ of Muslims, their ‘propensity to violence’, their ‘deliberate disrespect’ of Hindu rituals and national symbols, their ‘tendency to dominate when in a majority’ anywhere, etc,” writes Jha. It was no surprise, what we saw in terms of UP Assembly results and Adityanath’s selection

as the CM was a reward of donkey's years of work on the ground. Jha rightly notes in the book that the trouble sowed by the HYV through its utterly communal acts and speeches eventually paid electoral dividends. He has also pointed out to the leniency practised by the state apparatus to pave the way for Adityanath's success.

"It is not surprising that despite being named in a number of FIRs, Adityanath's name hardly ever figures in any charge sheet filed by the police after the investigation," remarks Jha. "Every time Adityanath or any HYV member figures in an FIR, a CB-CID inquiry comes to their rescue. This has remained a standard pattern in Gorakhpur. So far the local officials conducting CB-CID probes have not disappointed Yogi Adityanath," reveals the author explaining the connivance of the state governments.

What is remarkable about the book is that, despite the author's personal dislike for Hindutva politics he avoids judgement. Jha is dispassionate in his approach and relies solely on thorough research and instead of putting words into the mouth of the foot soldiers, he lets them speak. It is a perfect example of "Show, don't tell" technique of writing. It is a must-read book to understand the politics of our times.

Shadow Armies: Fringe Organizations and Foot Soldiers of Hindutva

Dhirendra K. Jha

Juggernaut, 2017 Rs 499, pp 229

<http://www.catchnews.com/india-news/shadow-armies-review-a-timely-book-that-explains-the-meteoric-rise-of-hindutva-in-india-59525.html>

Courtesy: Catchnews



Hindutva, Hinduness and Hinduism

The term Hindutva – explained by Savarkar as 'Hinduness' and not 'Hinduism' is almost always used to refer to the core idea at the heart of the members of The Sangh Parivar. But on the ground it is easy to get misled if one does not reverse the meaning of the term. It is Hinduism that is invoked to ensure the mobilization of masses and the polarization of voters. Hindutva as an ideological construct simply vanishes the moment one leaves the national headquarters of the BJP and the RSS.

The irony is that the young men from backward or lower castes who constitute a significant portion of the foot soldiers of these shadow armies are rarely able to recognize that the Hindutva to which they have dedicated their energies is nothing but Brahmanism. And that is the same brahmanical Hinduism that has kept them oppressed for centuries and against which they have their own legacies of resistance. They are so blinded by their growing Hindu religiosity and hatred for the threatening other that they simply cannot see how the Hindutva they are working for ultimately seeks to revive the historical hegemony of Brahmins and other upper castes.

Extract from 'Shadow Armies'

Dhirendra K Jha

‘Hindutva Politics Feeds on Chaos’

Omais Ahmad

(In conversation with *The Wire*, Dharendra Jha talks about his book **Shadow Armies: Fringe Organizations and Foot Soldiers of Hindutva**.)

As goons masquerading as protectors of Hindu values, women or cows attack and kill people across the country, we remain largely unsure about who these people are. Dharendra Jha's *Shadow Armies: Fringe Organizations and Foot Soldiers of Hindutva*, published by Juggernaut, traces the history behind many of these organisations, who are angered by everything from Valentine's Day to Muslims, to secular rationalists who are unabashedly atheist. Split into eight simple chapters, the book includes information on such well-known organisations as the Bajrang Dal, as well as institutions such as the Bhonsala Military School, which was set up to make sure Hindu nationalists qualify for the Indian military. The last chapter, on the Rashtriya Sikh Sangat, delineates the attempt at including the Sikhs within the Hindu nationalist camp – and its violent failure.

Jha spoke to *The Wire* about the book, how it came about and the interlinkages between the actors he has documented.

Excerpts from the interview:

What made you decide to do this book?

In May 2014, an extraordinary process began in India. The BJP's striking victory in the Lok Sabha elections marked a sudden spurt in activities of disparate Hindu militia groups. Hate speeches, '*ghar wapsi*' and attack on minorities in the name of cow protection and '*love jihad*' became frequent. The deepening links of these groups with the ruling party magnified the impact of these social disruptions, which appeared part of a larger design of Hindu nationalist project. There was, however, little insight into the actual mechanisms that underlay the evolution of these groups and the complex manner in which they connected with the overall politics of the BJP and the RSS. As a reporter covering the Sangh *parivar*, I kept a close eye on these groups and their activities, and when towards the mid-2015 Juggernaut suggested that I should tackle a book about the 'shadow armies', I immediately got down to frame the project.

This is a huge range of organisations, but are they all of them? What about the sadhvi associated with the '*gau rakshaks*' that murdered Pehlu Khan in Rajasthan?

I took up eight Hindutva outfits for study. Four of them are organisationally part of the RSS-led Sangh *parivar* while the remaining ones are independent entities. These are the prominent but not the only Hindu militia groups. At present, the RSS has roughly three dozen affiliate groups across the country. Several groups – both big and small – exist outside the purview of the Sangh *parivar*. In some areas, as in Rajasthan, *gau rakshaks* operate as an independent group, but in other areas, even the militia groups I studied double up as *gau rakshaks* from time to time.

Is there an organisation linkage that ties everybody together? From your chapter on Abhinav Bharat, it seems that the RSS and BJP were also confused.

Not all the Hindu militia groups are organisationally linked to each other. Some are part of the Sangh parivar while others are not, and yet all have their umbilical cord attached to the RSS and are ideologically on the same page. Portraying minorities, especially Muslims, as imaginary threats to Hindus and attacking them constantly, has remained the single most important tool of all the strands of Hindutva politics. On occasions, when it is inconvenient, the BJP and the RSS disown the outfit. Thus, when Maharashtra ATS started probing terror links of Abhinav Bharat, the BJP and the RSS got bewildered and declared the outfit as a fringe organisation that never enjoyed their patronage. But Abhinav Bharat's RSS roots could not be hidden.

Sameer Kulkarni, who had asked Himani Savarkar to head Abhinav Bharat and who had initiated the Madhya Pradesh branch of the organisation, was an RSS pracharak. Similarly, retired Major Ramesh Upadhyay, another prominent Abhinav Bharat leader, has strong Sangh parivar connections. Before joining the outfit, he was the president of the Mumbai unit of the BJP's ex-servicemen cell. No less significant is the political track record of Sadhvi Pragya Singh, the first person to be arrested in the Malegaon 2008 blast case. She had been a leader of Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, the student wing of the RSS, before taking up *sanyas*. There are many such instances.

Why are there so many such organisations? If they all derive from the RSS, then how does it benefit to have so much chaos?

Hindutva politics feeds on chaos. Its hydra-like structure is its strength and not a weakness. The BJP's electoral fortunes have remained largely dependent on reaping votes that grow out of seeds of communal propaganda and campaign sown not just by its pan-India associates but also by a large number of organisations working locally in various regions of the country. The tasks of brazen kind required to create polarisation in the society may not be carried out swiftly and easily if the Hindu militia outfits do not have multiple faces. This also makes it difficult for the state authorities to clamp down on them.

In your chapter on the Sanatan Sanstha, you imply that they may have received support for actors other than the RSS/BJP, who and why?

Though the BJP and the RSS have remained sympathetic to Sanatan Sanstha, no better has been the track record of the Congress. For some unexplained reasons, the Congress, when in power, did not deal firmly with this outfit despite gathering sufficient proof of the involvement of its members in acts of terror during 2008-2009. Perhaps, the Congress' fear that banning of the Sanstha might push the traditional Hindu voters of Maharashtra to the BJP led it go for appeasement towards the outfit.

The Bhonsala Military School chapter is very interesting. The right-wing didn't have many military figures until now – Jaswant Singh was hardly right-wing – but now they are all around. Is there a connection?

A number of army men seem to drift towards Hindutva organisations after retirement, possibly because the communalism at such places is garbed as nationalism. The Bhonsala Military School, with its curious combination of Hindutva ideology and military training, seems equipped to capture the imagination such military figures whose sense of nationalism can easily get mixed up with Hindu communalism.

<https://thewire.in/129799/the-spiderweb-of-the-sangh/>

Courtesy: The Wire



The Onslaught of Unreason

The world today is in the grip of terrible reaction against reason. You can go any part of the world and you will find that everywhere reason is at discount. People are not today in a position to discuss anything from a rational point of view.

We are witnessing today in a more virulent form of resurgence of the same dark period in modern Europe. There is the same anxiety to deny the supremacy of reason in human life; many machines with strong muscles to do the work that is assigned to them but no brains to think for themselves; all the achievements of renaissance seem to crumble into dust before the mighty and the powerful onslaught of unreason. Man seems to be moving in a circle; if at one time he seems to progress towards freedom and reason; at another moment he is willing to throw overboard not only his freedom but his power of reasoning as well, in order that he may become a more efficient instrument for carrying out his dictator's wish.

Does it mean that reason is never to triumph at all in our life? Does it mean that we are always to be the slaves of our own passions and the slaves of somebody with a stronger will than our own? Does it mean that man has been endowed with this thinking faculty only to make fool of himself? One philosopher has said that man is thinking animal. I am sure he would not have made that remark if he had lived in our time and seen with his own eyes hoe countless numbers of people willingly give up the very idea of thinking things for themselves and leave it to somebody who of course uses this opportunity for his own pet schemes or ambitions.

But somehow the dreams of our philosophers, our scientists and our men of genius must come true; we must bring back reason from the wilderness and enthrone it in the very centre of our life; it is possible that for the present when there is much triumph of unreason we may not succeed on a very large scale. ... When the light of reason is extinguished, freedom also disappears and along with the disappearance of freedom many valuable things are lost which can never be recovered except by a supreme renewed effort. Similarly there are men and women all over the world who are silently working for a rational ordering of things, who are hoping that someday, somehow, the supremacy of reason will be recognized in the affairs of men and people will have a brighter, freer and more joyous existence.

G. Y. Chitnis
"Reason", Sept 1940

Everything you need to know about Sunil Kulkarni's cult 'Shifu Sunkriti'

Sonali Pimputkar

"We are not prostitutes, we are not drug addicts. #Save us from our parents"

"Hon. Bombay HC, we are victims and we need justice #Save us from our parents"

read the placards held by siblings that were on a protest walk from Bombay High Court to Marine Drive on Wednesday (19 April 2017)

Malad Police on Thursday, April 20, arrested Sunil Kulkarni, founder of Shifu Sunkriti cult group, in connection with human trafficking and obscenity on social media. Kulkarni has been booked under various IPC sections including 370 (trafficking of person), 328 (causing hurt by means of poison), 420 (cheating), 292 (sale of obscene books) and also under IT Act sections 67 (publishing or transmitting obscene material in electronic form and 67 (a) (publishing or transmitting in the electronic form any material which contains sexually explicit act or conduct).

What is Shifu Sunkriti?

The group Shifu Sunkriti, founded by Sunil Kulkarni, has been accused of hypnotising, sexually assaulting and providing drugs to young women in the age group 18-25 and luring them into prostitution. To publicise the ideas he has created Facebook, Instagram, Twitter accounts through which he trains people on 'neuroplasticity resilience'. A look at its social media accounts gives a clear idea what Shifu Sunkriti is. The accounts are literally a repository of hallucinatory images and information. "I am mystic who will touch your inner animal, show its extreme and then drag you to your Soul Nature by getting emotionally naked and connecting to your brain and neural capacity" reads the homepage of Shifu Sunkriti's website.

"The Mystic of Soul-Making. Connecting People to Their Brain and Neural Capacity for Harmony. Search the Animal Within You and get Emotionally Naked" reads the group's Instagram's introduction.

"I am mystic who will touch your inner animal, show its extreme and then drag you to your Soul Nature" reads the group's Facebook introduction.

In a recent interview Sunil Kulkarni was quoted saying, "I trained people on neuroplasticity resilience, it is a total connect of a brain to the body through the spinal cord through the electrical energy through the endocrinal glands that is basically the chemical energy. When all this is brought together, we get connected to ourselves. To do that, you have to physically get naked before yourself and then look at your body, get friendly with your body, then you actually get emotionally naked. You should have that courage."

In an interview to a daily while before his arrest, he was asked about the cult group to which he replied, "Shifu Sunkriti is not an organisation. It is my mystic name. Shifu means master, Sunkriti means Sun (reason) + Prakriti."

Mysterious workshop(s)

The group conducts workshop and talk shows on regular basis that features sex education and obscene movies. The address of the events are always kept secret with only being provided to those who have registered for the events through e-mail address provided in the invite.

Event organised by Shifu Sunkriti

The concept of neuroplasticity is 'the ability of the brain to form and reorganize synaptic connections, especially in response to learning or experience or following injury.' But it is nowhere close to what the description in the post suggests. In the details of the workshop, it mentions the address of the centre as Bandra but yields no concreted address when traced.

Disturbing posts/images

The images used in the posts are obscene and disturbing at the same time. Most of the pictures are sourced from Google and are posted with captions/quotes on sex, romance, relationship, soul, brain or mental health. Also the descriptions in the post are nothing but a regular usage of psychological or scientific words used in a illogical way just to attract the reader. Apart from the mentioned topics, it also deal with delicate topics such as women empowerment and violence against women that are also presented in a disturbing way.

About the case

'Shifu Sunkriti' came into limelight after Malad-based couple filed a petition against Sunil Kulkarni and his cult Shifu Sunkruti claiming that their daughters had fallen prey to the cult. Kulkarni who claims to be psychologist and doctors captures mind of young girls and lure them into prostitution. He also has a case of sexual assault against him. In January 2017, the girl left their parents home to live with Kulkarni and accused their parents for domestic violence and confinement. While Kulkarni claims that the girls want to stay an independent life as their parents confined them and he is just helping the girls in what they want. In a hearing on April 20, the High Court dismissed the siblings statement that they left by their own choice and not by pressure, by stating that it is clear that the girls had been brainwashed by Kulkarni.

Who exactly is Kulkarni?

Kulkarni claims that he is a psychiatrist and has done his MD in Psychiatry in Nagpur's Indira Gandhi Government Medical College. But, according to the police, there is no record of Kulkarni graduating from the said college.

Prior to this, Sunil has several cases registered against him. There is a rape case registered against him by a minor in Delhi, under Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses Act (POCSO) but he managed to get bail and then settled in Mumbai. There are other financial cases as well. The Crime Branch arrested him on Wednesday. Following the arrest, they raided his house in Bandra and found antidepressant tablets and abortion pills, which he is not qualified to prescribe to anyone. The police also found several clips of naked girls and are trying to verify their identity.

Skeletons tumbling

According to a report in Indian Express, one of the siblings confided in a friend that she had engaged in sexual intercourse with Kulkarni. While Kulkarni primarily operated out of Bandra his family stays in New Delhi and soon he will be visiting New Delhi in order to record statements for his earlier cases. According to a few media reports, Kulkarni used to be a guest lecturer at Mithibhai and NM College in Vile Parle, which the police are still trying to verify.

Disturbing Facebook posts

On the Facebook page, he uploads images which are disturbing and trippy at the same time. There is pop psychology or psychedelic images with quotes about mental health, sex, romance, existence, and neuroplasticity. The page also uploads alerts about workshops which are held in Bandra but the address is missing from the post. Some of the workshops are about mental health and well-being, while some are about finding a woman's G- spot, and talking about sex expectations. In one of the posts, one of the siblings who is involved in the case is seen with Dr Mahendra Watsu (famous sex expert). Police are also trying to find if any information can be collected from this angle.

What the siblings say

The siblings on Wednesday started a protest march from Bombay High Court to Marine Drive, The girls walked from Bombay High Court to Marine Drive holding placards which read, "We are not prostitutes, we are not drug addicts. #Save us from our parents" and "Hon. Bombay HC, we are victims and we need justice #Save us from our parents"

The two girls who are residents of Malad have alleged that their parents have tortured them emotionally and physically as well. December last year the girls were allegedly confined to their rooms and were tortured by their parents. Later, these girls were rescued with the help of their friends and Malad police.

Shivangi Sule told Free Press Journal, "All the allegations levelled against Sunil Kulkarni by our parents are incorrect and baseless. My parents have just used the background of Kulkarni to hide their own acts of violence against each other," adding, "Kulkarni was the visiting faculty in my college and I met him there through a common friend and now I am working with him." The Sule sisters claimed that they had even written to DCP (Zone XI) Vikram Deshmane on March 2. "Our parents have hired goons and influenced a political party to make life hell for us," Shivangi said.

Recent Development

"So far, he has only confessed that he is neither a psychiatrist nor any degree holder in medicine. Kulkarni is an imposter, but the police could not gather adequate evidence against him. The witness girl was under extreme influence of Kulkarni. Despite repeated phone calls, she is not coming forward to give evidence against Kulkarni. Her statement is a must to tighten the case," said an investigating officer of the Crime Branch.

Mumbai Police has written to various educational institutions wherein Kulkarni delivered his lectures and interacted with students. "We have asked for the closed circuit television cameras (CCTVs) footages from educational institutions, so we can scan the students and talk with them on Kulkarni. His modus operandi is to catch the mentally weak students and those who have aspiring to become film stars," he added.

<http://www.freepressjournal.in/mumbai/everything-you-need-to-know-about-kulkarnis-cult-shifu-sunkriti/1055671><http://www.freepressjournal.in/mumbai/sex-guru-nabbed-shocking-details-of-sunil-kulkarni-and-shifu-sunkriti/1055637>

Courtesy: Free Press Journal



Aum Shinrikyo: The Japanese cult surfacing in Europe

Where did the cult come from?

It originated in Japan, where it was behind the deadly sarin nerve gas attack on the Tokyo subway in 1995. Aum Shinrikyo, whose name means "supreme truth", began in the 1980s as a spiritual group mixing Hindu and Buddhist beliefs, later working in elements of apocalyptic Christian prophecies. The group's founder, Shoko Asahara, declared himself to be both Christ and the first "enlightened one" since Buddha.

The group, often shortened to just Aum, gained official status as a religious organisation in Japan in 1989. Asahara picked up a sizable global following, speaking at universities and writing books. At its peak, he had tens of thousands of members worldwide. Many of his followers in Japan were students at elite universities. Much has been made of the group's promise of a more meaningful life to young people from academically pressured backgrounds who had to look forward to similarly pressured careers.

The group gradually became a paranoid doomsday cult, convinced the world was about to end in World War Three and that only they would survive. It also became increasingly violent, kidnapping, injuring, and killing opponents, and even using chemical and biological agents in other attacks.

What happened in Tokyo?

On 20 March 1995, during rush hour, cult members punctured bags filled with a liquid form of the nerve agent sarin, using sharpened umbrellas, on train lines that went through Tokyo's political district. The attack killed 13 people and injured thousands more.

In subsequent months, cult members carried out several failed attempts at releasing hydrogen cyanide in various stations. The 1995 attack shocked Japan, a country that prided itself on low crime rates and social cohesion. It also raised questions about police failings to investigate previous allegations of criminal activity by the group. Scores of Aum members have faced trial over the attack - 13 were sentenced to death, including Asahara, who remains on death row.

The last to be tried in connection with the subway attack was Katsuya Takahashi, arrested in June 2012 after being on the run for 17 years. He was sentenced to life in jail. Cult member Makoto Hirata was also jailed in 2014 for the abduction of a 68-year-old man and his involvement in two bomb attacks.

Why are they in Europe now?

The group went underground after Tokyo, but did not disappear, eventually renaming itself Aleph. Another, smaller group, Hikari no Wa (Circle of Rainbow Light), headed by Aum's former spokesman and Asahara's successor Fumihiro Joyu, was formed in 2007. Joyu claimed to have distanced his group from worship of Asahara. The group had operations in the former Soviet states in the upheaval following the collapse of the USSR, but the region has become increasingly important in recent years.

In late March, Montenegro expelled 58 foreigners suspected of association with Aum Shinrikyo. They were gathered at a hotel they had rented in the tiny former Yugoslav state. Four were from Japan, the interior ministry said, but 43 from Russia, seven from Belarus, three from Ukraine, and one from Uzbekistan. The Russian raids in early April targeted 25 properties.

The group is illegal in Russia but prosecutors said it may have up to 30,000 Russian followers, and has been pressurising people for donations. Officials have opened a criminal investigation, saying the group's activities "involve violence against citizens and injury to their health," state media reported.

And in Japan?

Aum Shinrikyo is designated as a terrorist organisation in the US and many other countries, but Aleph and Hikari no Wa are both legal in Japan, albeit designated as "dangerous religions" subject to heightened surveillance. Some estimates say they have 1,500 followers between them, with reports the number is slowly growing.

A few human rights advocates have defended those members who have not been found guilty of crimes, saying they were unaware of plans to attack the Tokyo subway. But members face little prospect of receiving social or official acceptance, despite attempts to distance themselves from the events of 21 years ago.

Mass suicide at Jonestown

On this day in 1978, Peoples Temple founder Jim Jones leads hundreds of his followers in a mass murder-suicide at their agricultural commune in a remote part of the South American nation of Guyana. Many of Jones' followers willingly ingested a poison-laced punch while others were forced to do so at gunpoint. The final death toll at Jonestown that day was 909; a third of those who perished were children.

Jim Jones was a charismatic churchman who established the Peoples Temple, a Christian sect, in Indianapolis in the 1950s. He preached against racism, and his integrated congregation attracted many African Americans. In 1965, he moved the group to Northern California, settling in Ukiah and after 1971 in San Francisco. In the 1970s, his church was accused by the media of financial fraud, physical abuse of its members and mistreatment of children. In response to the mounting criticism, the increasingly paranoid Jones invited his congregation to move with him to Guyana, where he promised they would build a socialist utopia. Three years earlier, a small group of his followers had traveled to the tiny nation to set up what would become Jonestown on a tract of jungle.

Jonestown did not turn out to be the paradise their leader had promised. Temple members worked long days in the fields and were subjected to harsh punishments if they questioned Jones' authority. Their passports were confiscated, their letters home censored and members were encouraged to inform on one another and forced to attend lengthy, late-night meetings. Jones, by then in declining mental health and addicted to drugs, was convinced the U.S. government and others were out to destroy him. He required Temple members to participate in mock suicide drills in the middle of the night.

In 1978, a group of former Temple members and concerned relatives of current members convinced U.S. Congressman Leo Ryan, a Democrat of California, to travel to Jonestown and investigate the settlement. On November 17, 1978, Ryan arrived in Jonestown with a group of journalists and other observers. At first the visit went well, but the next day, as Ryan's delegation was about to leave, several Jonestown residents approached the group and asked them for passage out of Guyana. Jones became distressed at the defection of his followers, and one of Jones' lieutenants attacked Ryan with a knife. The congressman escaped from the incident unharmed, but Jones then ordered Ryan and his companions ambushed and killed at the airstrip as they attempted to leave. The congressman and four others were murdered as they boarded their charter planes.

Back in Jonestown, Jones commanded everyone to gather in the main pavilion and commit what he termed a "revolutionary act." The youngest members of the Peoples Temple were the first to die, as parents and nurses used syringes to drop a potent mix of cyanide, sedatives and powdered fruit juice into children's throats. Adults then lined up to drink the poison-laced concoction while armed guards surrounded the pavilion.

When Guyanese officials arrived at the Jonestown compound the next day, they found it carpeted with hundreds of bodies. Many people had perished with their arms around each other. A few residents managed to escape into the jungle as the suicides took place, while at least several dozen more Peoples Temple members, including several of Jones' sons, survived because they were in another part of Guyana at the time.

RSS Controlled Garbh Vigyan Sanskar in pursuit for “Master Race”

Ram Puniyani

The RSS agenda of Hindu Rashtra draws heavily on the superiority of Aryan race and greatness of Brahmanical values. The ideology constructed by this organisation tells us that Aryans are the superior race. The whole foundation of the concept of Hindu nation as the teacher-leader of the World derives from twin and inseparable notions of the racial theory, promoted by British and Brahmanism, clothed in the language of Hinduism. This came to fore once again when the spokesmen of Garbh Vigyan Sanskar (Uterus Science Culture), an offshoot of Arogya Bharati (health wing) of RSS, committed to creating Uttam santati, (Best Progeny) based on ancient Indian knowledge of Ayurveda outlined their plans. The claim is that by following the proper instructions as put together by this outfit; one can get the children, which are tall and fair, despite their parents not being so.

RSS has many wings one of them being Arogya Bharati (health wing). It has devised meticulous plans for the couples to have a ‘perfectly customised child’. This is what has been reported in the media recently. As per the process devised by this outfit there is a period of three months of ‘shuddhikaran’ or purification for the parents. This means that the timing of intercourse is decided by the positions of the ‘planetary configurations’ and a period of abstinence once the baby is conceived. This is to be followed by series of procedures and regulations in the matters of diet in particular.

These days lot of illogical understanding is easily passing the muster of popular perception in the name of traditional knowledge. The extent of this is the belief that ancient India had advanced plastic surgery techniques, and great leaps in aviation science, including Pushpak Viman (Aeroplane), the truth is that modern medical science has broken lot of mysteries of the scone of child bearing, growth and rearing. The conception of child does not depend on the planetary configurations but on the meeting of sperm with ovum, on and around the day of ovulation of the female. The Hindutva ideology is bent to promote the faith-based knowledge systems, undermining the immaculate researchers and gains of modern science. Even earlier Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi, in the previous NDA regime had introduced changes in the educational curriculum by introducing Paurohitya (Priest craft) and Karmakand (Ritualism). One of the components of this was Putra Kameshti Yagna (ritual to get male child), the performance of which should lead to the birth of a male child. As per current knowledge, the sex of the baby is determined by the male’s Y or X chromosome meeting the ovum and not by any other influence which these rituals are supposed to influence.

The health of the baby and its rearing has many components, which included proper dietary supplements, regular exercises of the mother and good nutrition and rearing of the child as she comes up in the society. The growth of body, physical and intellectual is a long process of rearing

Contd...page 20

RSS-Linked Organisation Promises Couples Customised, Fair 'Super Babies'

The organisation claims that children conceived through their 'garbh sanskar' methods will have an early development of childhood milestones like sentence formation. They will also be braver, more creative and less stubborn than other children, and can be 'fair' even if both parents are 'dark'.

New Delhi: India is the land of Gandhi and the Buddha, an Indian official told the United Nations last week. "We cannot have a racist mindset." What would he then say to the promise made by the "medical wing" of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh – parent organisation of the party that is currently running the Indian government – promising prospective "dark-skinned" parents who undergo its workshop and procedures "babies ... with fair complexion"?

Call it racism or quackery, the Calcutta high court on Friday decided to allow the RSS-linked Arogya Bharati to carry out a programme on how to conceive children that would be tall and fair provided it adhered to strict conditions. The workshop in Calcutta intended to tell couples ancient secrets on how to conceive a 'susantan' or a super baby, reported NDTV. West Bengal's Commission for Protection of Child Rights had approached the high court seeking guidance on the programme.

The workshop, priced at Rs 500 per couple, was to be conducted by Dr Karishma Narvin, a visiting lecturer at Gujarat Ayurved University, Jamnagar.

Dr Hitesh Jani, also from the Gujarat Ayurved University, told NDTV that modern-day genetic science allows for genetic engineering in vitro, which is in a petri dish, whereas the garbh sanskar which they propagate would enable this genetic engineering to be in vivo, inside the womb itself.

The court allowed the programme to be held but set the condition that no money can be charged for it and only a lecture can be given, there should be no administration of any treatment. The court also asked that the event be videotaped and submitted to the court.

The website of 'Garbhvigyan Anusandhan Kendra' says, "Garbh Sanskar, a scientifically proven fact, is an amazing way of teaching/educating and bonding with unborn baby in womb during pregnancy." For this, they ask couples "to increase the good karmic level to such an extent that the divine soul chooses it to be its parents." They say that children born after garbh sanskar will have an early development of childhood milestones like sentence formation. They will also be braver, more creative and less stubborn than other children. They also claim to be able to mitigate hereditary diseases if garbh sanskar is "started during planning phase with full devotion." Ultimately, the organisation says that all this helps in "getting best progeny". They do this via Ayurvedic herbs and Panchkarma therapies, and by regulating diet, through yoga, music CDs and activity plans.

The Indian Express reported that the project claims to have successfully delivered 450 customised babies. However, the 'success stories' section of their website has two pieces of identical text, written in faux Latin. The Indian Express also said that some of the expected protocols will involve three months of 'shuddhikaran' or purification. The time of intercourse will be decided by the position of the planets. The couple must not have any intercourse during pregnancy. All of this together will give the couples their 'uttam santati' or perfect and customised child. The project started in Gujarat and plans on having centres in every state by 2020.

Jani, the national convenor of Arogya Bharati, was quoted by Indian Express as saying, "The parents may have lower IQ, with a poor educational background, but their baby can be extremely bright. If the proper procedure is followed, babies of dark-skinned parents with lesser height can have fair complexion and grow taller."

where the proper nutrition, games and intellectual stimuli, are the foundation of the health of the child. In contrast here in this scheme of things the planets, supernatural powers are projected as the main players along with the recommended diet.

RSS ideology has been inspired a lot from German Fascism not just in the matters of concept of nationalism but also in the projection of Aryan superiority. Being the World leaders-teachers as well is core part of this ideology. So a superior race is necessary in this ideology. Germany tried this in the form of eugenics. That experiment was a disaster. Nazis had the program called “Lebensborn” (“Spring of Life”), which aimed to create an Aryan master race. For this breeding of children of pure Aryan race, some 8,000 children were born in Germany and around 12,000 in Norway as part of “Lebensborn” under the direct supervision Nazi theoretician and leader, Heinrich Himmler. This encouraged women of “pure blood” to bear fair-tall Aryan children. The result was that most of such bred children did not grow on expected lines. This horrendous scheme was central part of the inhuman racial policy. This policy on one hand aimed at producing pure Aryan children and on the other hand wanted to eliminate non-Aryans like Jews, 6 million of them were killed and the forced sterilisation of people with hereditary diseases. This policy was harsh to non dominant people and to people with different ability. Needless to say that even the theory of race is totally discredited today and what we know is that we are all mixed up people with origin of Human race located in South Africa.

It is in this light that the statement of Tarun Vijay, (We have been living with dark skinned people) is to be seen. This reveals RSS understanding of white superior Aryans living with black South Indians. As such major RSS ideologue M.S. Golwalkar had already prescribed for a better race when he wrote, “now let us see the experiments our ancestors made in this sphere. In an effort to better the human species through cross-breeding the Namboodri Brahmanas [sic] of the North were settled in Kerala and a rule was laid down that the eldest son of a Namboodri family could marry only the daughter of Vaishya, Kshatriya or Shudra communities of Kerala. Another still more courageous rule was that the first off-spring of a married woman of any class must be fathered by a Namboodri Brahman and then she could beget children by her husband.” (Quoted in RSS journal Organiser, 2nd January 1962)

The spokesmen of this program tell us that they have begun their work from Gujarat, where nearly 450 babies have been born on these lines and now they intend to spread their branches in different states by 2020 as their work is already in progress in different states. What’s in store for us is very clear from this plan of health division of Hindutva fountain head. We need to harp only on rational scientific strategies in our health planning.

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Religion-based Nationalism is back in Full Force

Romila Thapar

In the 1960s we were confident that the use of religion for political mobilisation would decline because nationalism, namely, the secular, all-inclusive, anti-colonialism nationalism that brought us independence, would, despite Partition, be firmly established. This was in some ways such a firm belief that it was not thought necessary to specify the inclusion of secularism in the Constitution at the initial stage. This has not happened. Religion as political mobilisation, and religion-based identity as the core of nationalism, sometimes called communalism, is back in full force.

Historians and other social scientists do not make predictions. Our inability to do so is because there may always be some irrational factor in our society that intervenes. So we can only analyse what went wrong and make some suggestions for how to put it right.

It is useful to consider the changing contours of communalism in post-colonial India since the parameters and the historical context are no longer the same as they were in colonial times. There was, to begin with, an anti-colonial relatively secular nationalism that pre-dated and was distinct from communalism, both Muslim and Hindu.

Communalism was born out of colonial policy, and took as its foundation the dubious two-nation theory that culminated in two categories of communalism – Muslim and Hindu. The first led to the creation of Pakistan. Hindu communalism is awaiting its fulfillment.

Communalism continues to have a role in the politics of post-colonial India, but this is not identical with its earlier role. The prime reason for anti-colonial secular nationalism has ostensibly been removed after independence, since we are no longer a colony and do not require an anti-colonial nationalism. But we still have to contend with the kind of communalism, that is aspiring to a Hindu *Rashtra*, of the 1930s vintage.

Interestingly the defining of this form of a nation, is embedded in the colonial interpretation of Indian society. It goes back to the nineteenth century interpretation of Indian history by James Mill who spoke of the two nations that have always constituted India – namely, the Hindu and the Muslim.

The two-nation theory fueled communalism, assisted by another colonial contribution which was the Census that led to describing Indian society as consisting of a majority community and minority communities. To this was added the colonial theory of the foundation of Indian civilisation being the Aryanism of the *Vedas*. This contributed to the concept of the nation as a Hindu *Rashtra* and the Hindu therefore being the primary citizen of India.

Whereas the major nationalism of anti-colonialism led the movement for independence, the colonial perceptions of the history and society of India, gave root to the two communal nationalisms in the form of the Muslim league and the Hindu Mahasabha – to be replaced with the RSS. These latter two did not support secular anti-colonial nationalism but instead focused on opposing each other.

Subsequent to Independence, secular nationalism was no longer confronting a colonial power, but instead, it had to confront the power of identity politics that draws on religious extremism. The need for awareness to check the activities of religious extremism was under-estimated. Both Islamisation and Hindutva took the path of concretising Islamic and Hindu identities as oppositional.

Indian Governments have each to a greater or lesser extent, been party to such politics. We have experienced extreme violence against various minorities – Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Dalits. It has been and continues to be a serious threat to democracy in India.

It is difficult to establish a functioning democracy in a society where there are special categories of privileged and under-privileged groups, and majority and minority communities based on religious identities with varying rights ; and an ideology that endorses the two-nation theory, where religion, caste, and language, become identities. It is difficult because democracy requires the reverse of this - it means equal rights for all and an equality in laws applicable to all citizens.

Many of our problems come from an unquestioned inheritance that we have accepted of colonial policy, administration and law. We continue to base our identities derived from religion and caste on those that the colonial system imposed on us. If we were to question these, something different may well emerge. I often wonder whether all post-colonial societies nurture continuity and conservatism by clinging to what their colonizers had taught them about who and what they were and are ?

Communalism was born out of colonial policy, and took as its foundation the dubious two-nation theory that culminated in two categories of communalism – Muslim and Hindu. The first led to the creation of Pakistan. Hindu communalism is awaiting its fulfillment.

It would be interesting to do a comparative study with African and Caribbean nationalism, for instance, that saw the emergence of theories such as Negritude and where people read Aimee Cesaire and Leopold Senghor when constructing their nationalisms. Did they also go back to colonial versions of their past or did they question these versions?

Are the ideologies of religious and cultural extremism invariably drawn from the interpretations of the society and culture of the ex-colony as constructed by the colonisers ? In other words do we have to endorse the identities that British colonialism imposed on us? Can we not instead question these identities and consider alternatives. The continuation of such identities is inherently anti-democratic. They were meant for a colony not for a free democracy.

This debate has been going on for a while now. There is a need to change the premises. Instead of speaking of the past only in terms of who victimised whom, (and as we all know such theories of victimisation are easily constructed), we should instead look more carefully at what we want from the present and what from the past can help us construct a more positive present.

We have to recognise that we too, like every other society with a long past, have not been a society characterized by tolerance and non-violence. However much we may wish to believe that we were tolerant and non-violent, it simply isn't true.

Such theories served their purpose in the days when we were contesting colonialism. But they are not of much help now with the constant daily actions that we witness or even experience, of intolerance and violence, and it seems to increase by the day. But we cannot suddenly have become violent and intolerant. There have to have been some elements of such behaviour in us in the past as well, which we perhaps kept under better control. It would be salutary to investigate why there was less of violence and intolerance in the past, if that was so?

Our texts from pre-Islamic times tell us that there were two streams of *dharma* that were dominant – the Brahmanical and the Shramanic. The latter were the Buddhists, Jainas, Ajivikas and such like. There are rulers that insistently call for tolerance among the sects as in the edicts of Ashoka Maurya, or there are references to conflicts between sects in Sanskrit texts, or in accounts of visitors to India in those times.

Patanjali, the great grammarian of around the second century BC, refers to the two streams of *dharma* as dominant, and adds that their relationship can be compared to that of the snake and the mongoose. Buddhism was finally exiled from India. Sectarian conflicts continued into Islamic times with now an additional factor.

As far as intolerance goes, we must also remind ourselves that every religion in India discriminated against what we today call the Dalits. Even the religions that claimed that all men are equal in the eyes of God, did not give them equality.

Islam and Christianity did not have a category of Dalits outside India, but in India, Muslim, Christian and Sikh Dalits were segregated and lived separately. These are aspects of our society that we still have to come to terms with. We cannot claim to have been a tolerant society in the past by ignoring our treatment of some sections of society that we are now trying to amend. Intolerance does not refer only to religion. It also refers to the demeaning of another human being.

If we want a democracy then it has inevitably to be secular, and not give rights to privileged groups. This is irrespective of whether the claim is that such rights are justified by status or by numbers. It means that institutions of society have to be so organized that privileging a group becomes redundant.

This means a constant check on the functioning of those institutions that sustain a democracy to ensure that they are doing so. This also means being aware, for instance, that institutions of education where we learn about secular democracy, and are socialised to belonging to a democratic society, are not dismantled, or are replaced with teaching that is anti-democratic. This is a serious threat.

It also means changing the mind-set of institutions and people to encourage them to understand and support a democratic society.

What are the major institutions that would be involved with this?

The Constitution is based on values of secular democracy but most of us know so little about it. Perhaps we should be more aware of how it defends democracy. This would also involve greater knowledge about the functioning of the judiciary – so crucial to the current many crises.

We have to recognize that we too, like every other society with a long past, have not been a society characterized by tolerance and non-violence. However much we may wish to believe that we were tolerant and non-violent, it simply isn't true.

The Code of Civil Laws should be geared to eliminating the continuing discrimination against Dalits, Adivasis and women. We also need to check from time to time to ascertain as to how affirmative action is working and who is benefiting from it. It does seem curious - and this question is now being commonly asked - as to why dominant castes in so many parts of the nation are taking to violence to ensure that they be given reservation rights, some of which are reserved only for those that have an under-privileged status.

A major positive change can be brought about if quality education is made available to all. The aim should not be just for literacy but also to teaching the young how to think, how to question their world, and how to improve it. The aim should be to impart how to handle knowledge and why this is important. Education is not just the acquiring of information. We have to remember that in the coming generation virtually half the population will be young adults with aspirations.

We have to ensure basic human rights so that five hundred million Indians can live with dignity. We have to think of how we can perhaps insist that our administrators, those that run our institutions as well as those that are required to protect us, be taught that their prime function is to protect the rights and the person of the Indian citizen? Subservience to authority is not what is required from them. They have to be encouraged to be helpful to the citizen.

May be that if we begin to make these our demands and do so with a firm commitment, then some of the indignities associated with the communal mind-set, and that are so common in our society, may start to fade.

Communalism is ultimately an attitude of mind among people based on the assumption that whatever is told to them by their mentors is all they need to know. It shows a disinterest in knowing better. To focus therefore solely on the rights of religious communities – whether of the majority or the minority – ultimately has a limited purpose. This will not terminate communalism.

It seems to me that we have to think of other ways by which identities are defined. We seem to have arrived at a point when communal ideas and activities are taken as legitimate nationalism. We have to disentangle nationalism from communalism. No group has a monopoly on claiming that its activities alone, constitute nationalism, and all others are anti-national. We have to reconstruct nationalism in an inclusive, secular mode, to allow every Indian to participate equally and with equal rights.

<https://sabrangindia.in/article/religion-based-nationalism-back-full-force-romila-thapar>

Courtesy: Sabrang India



‘India Will Not Be Unified on Religion But on Its Pyre’

_Rahul Sankrityayan

(An excerpt from Rahul Sankrityayan’s Tumhari Kshay, on why he thinks people must put humanity above religion.)

April 14 is the 54th death anniversary of prominent Hindi writer Rahul Sankrityayan, author of Volga se Ganga. Popularly known as ‘mahapandit’, Sankrityayan was truly a writer of the masses and participated in numerous public struggles. He went to prison several times and faced attacks from feudalists, but continued to be at the forefront of movements demanding freedom, equality and dignity for all. He is considered the father of travel writing in Hindi. He knew 26 different languages and was an erudite scholar. Born in Azamgarh in Uttar Pradesh, Sankrityayan was a writer who believed in mobility and travelled excessively. With his writings, he dreamt of doing away with societal inertia and putting humanity above religion. Here is an excerpt from his book Tumhari Kshay titled ‘Tumhare Dharm ki Kshay (The Decay of Your Religion)’.

In religions, differences abound. If followers of one face westwards to pray, those of another turn to the east. Some let their hair grow, others their beards; some want to keep a moustache, others shave it off; some slaughter animals slowly, others deal a single blow. They wear their clothes differently. One has castes further divided into various sects, the other doesn’t. While one vehemently rejects the possibility of a second god, for another everything and anything can be divine. For one the sacrifice of a cow is a holy act, while another is ready to kill humans to protect the cow.

And so, differences abound in religions across the world. These differences are not limited to ideas. The history of the past two millennia shows us how different faiths have persecuted each other over these differences. Why are the immortal artists of Greece and Rome lost today? Because a faith came to their country which considered the existence of idols a threat to itself. Why did Iran’s ethnic art, literature and culture become extinct? Because it came into contact with a religion bent on erasing humanity from the face of the Earth.

Everywhere – in Mexico and Peru, in Turkey and Afghanistan, in Egypt and Java – religions have proved themselves to be enemies of art, literature and culture. And, bloodshed? Don’t even ask. Each in the name of their gods and their books have spilt human blood as worthless. If the ancient Greeks considered it holy to get innocent Christian men, women and children mauled to death by lions or slain with swords, did Christians lag behind in cruelty when they seized power?

In the name of Jesus, they used swords openly. In Germany, a carnage was carried out to bring people into the fold of Christianity. Ancient Germans used to worship the Oak tree. To avoid people from falling back on the old path, all oak trees from near and far were uprooted. The pope and the patriarch suppressed freedom of thought of talented individuals with fire and iron. Many were crushed under wheels or burnt alive over ideological differences.

India too is no less a witness to such religious fanaticism. Before the advent of Islam, was molten lead and lac not poured in the mouths and ears of those that spoke or heard? With all his might, Adi Shankaracharya declared that Brahman alone is real, everything else is unreal. Even Ramanuja and others did little beyond preaching. In fact, they left no stone unturned in ensuring the oppression of the *shudras* and Dalits. Since the coming of Islam, its antagonism to Hinduism has plagued our country.

Though Islam professes to be the religion of power and universal brotherhood, and Hinduism as the religion of Brahma and tolerance, did either of them translate their claims into actions? The Hindus blame Muslims of murdering innocent people, defiling temples and holy sites or taking away their women, but have Hindus shown any restraint in spilling innocent blood when it comes to revenge?

Take the example of Hindu-Muslim riots in Kanpur, Benaras, Allahabad or Agra. Those who fall prey to the knives and *lathis* are innocent, oblivious men, women, and children. Hapless strangers from another village or neighbourhood passing by are stabbed, ignorant of their crime, while the attacker flees. All religions preach kindness but in all the incidents of violence in India carried out in the name of religion, humanity stands murdered. Not just the elderly, even babies have been butchered. Instances of religious enemies being burnt alive are not very uncommon even today.

We are related to each other by nation or by blood and to break the ties of blood is unnatural. In India, keeping aside the early differences, all Hindu castes have the same blood running through their veins. Can you tell a Brahmin from a shudra just by looking at someone? There are Brahmins darker in complexion than most shudras and *shudras* wheatish in colour. Men and women entering sexual relationships while ignoring caste differences is nothing strange.

Several dynasties are known for the slave son who became king or the son of the mistress who became prince. In spite of all this, Hinduism has kept people divided into thousands of castes. There are many who wish to unify the Hindus under one ethnicity, but where is that ethnicity? Hindu ethnicity is an imaginative concept. In reality, there are Brahmins, Sakaldwipiyas, Jujhautiyas, Rajputs, Khattris, Bhumihars, Kayasthas, Chamaars and many others.

For instance, the lifestyle, eating habits, customs and traditions of a Rajput would differ from the rest. Their social existence is limited. When a Rajput reaches a top post, he looks for another member from his own caste when it comes to offering a job or putting forth a recommendation. Such a limited vision is but natural when relations are formed with people from within the community.

Mocking Hindus over caste discrimination, Muslims often claim that they have broken social barriers and exist as one fraternity – but is this really true? If it were, the question of *julahas*, *dhuniyas*, *kunjras* and others would not arise and nobody would talk of lower and elite classes. The *syeds*, *sheikhs*, *maliks* and *pathans* treat classes beneath them the way their Hindu upper-caste counterparts do. Though what people eat was not a matter of contention in Islam, it is no longer so

among Hindus either. The question is – what have the elite among Muslims done to culturally or economically uplift their brethren from the lower classes?

In India, four to five crore Hindus sought refuge in Islam to escape social, economic and religious persecution. But did the elite Muslim class allow them to prosper? Seven centuries have passed but a Momin Ansari is a victim of similar discrimination at the hands of upper caste landlords as his Kurmi neighbour. They ask for reservations in government jobs, but when those seats are to be distributed among them, the miniscule elite Syed-Sheikh community take away most from right under the nose of the 60-70% of the community comprised of Momins and Ansaris, citing lack of education as the reason. If even 700 years later they lack education, whose fault is it? When were they given a chance to get educated? When opportunities were provided for education, for scholarships, they were snatched by the elite. Momins and Ansaris are expected to work as cooks, peons and servants. If one of them gets educated, he cannot find a strong recommendation from within his own community, while the elite are busy recommending their own friends and families. All the pains undertaken for jobs and posts are not out of a passion to serve the country or their own community but for money and in the quest for a better life.

Are Hindus and Muslims then two different communities just because they have two different faiths? They share the same ancestry. They were born and brought up in the same country. Though their beliefs, their methods of praying and their customs separate them, yet they are one race. Is blood not thicker than water? Outside India, who acknowledges the different castes and distinguishes between them? In any part of the world, we are just Hindi or Indian.

Damned be the religion that divides people, that inspires its believer to kill his brother in its name! When religion becomes defined by the length of hair or the size of a beard, it is only exterior and artificial.

A Chinese, whether he is a Buddhist, a Muslim, a Christian or a Confucian, is a Chinese. So is the case with a Japanese. Similarly, an Iranian would not choose a non-Persian name. Why, then, are we Indians keen on breaking up our country along religious lines? Why must we tolerate such behaviour?

Roots of religions have been axed and only rarely do we hear of incidents of religious harmony. To say '*Mazhab nahi sikhata aapas mein bair rakhna*' (Religion does not preach ill will against one another)' is nothing but to lie. If religion did not preach ill will, why would hostilities over religious differences keep ruining the country for thousands of years? That thirst of one religious community for the blood of another, who inspires it even today? Who is pitting those who eat beef against those who eat dung?

To render Iqbal's verse more real, one can say – *Mazhab to hai sikhata aapas mein bair rakhna, Bhai ko hai sikhata bhai ka khoon peena* (Religion does preach ill will against one another, it inspires brothers to drink each others' blood). India will not be unified on religion but on its pyre. A wolf in sheep's clothing is still a wolf. Religion is like that disease which comes naturally and which only death can cure.

On the one hand, religions are baying for each others' blood, preaching hatred against one another and following customs, speaking in languages, eating food antagonistic to each other. But when it comes to looting the poor and protecting the interests of the rich, they are of one mind.

The *maharaja* of Gadha village Baksh Singh was a fool of the first order in the seventh generation of his dynasty. Today, his annual earning amounts to Rs 50 lakh from land which he acquired without using an ounce of his brain and which he could not have managed longer than six days. It was not in his power to grow anything on it. Had the foolish maharaja been stranded in a jungle with a pile of rice, wheat, *ghee* and wood, he could not feed himself and would starve himself to death.

Today, the maharaja of Gadha village spends tens of thousands of rupees monthly on fuel for his motor car and owns breeds of dogs that cost 20,000 or more. Rs 2 lakh were spent on the palace built for him in the village which has an army of servants and family doctors. During the summers, ice slabs and electric fans are placed in the palace to keep it cool. And what to say of his eating habits! Even the servants of his servants bathe in milk and *ghee*. Where does all this wealth come from? What kinds of life do those who toil to earn it live? They live in such extreme poverty that they would readily feed their children with the leftovers of the maharaja's dogs.

Ask a *pandit*, what gives a foolish man the right to plunder the hard earned labour of another, and he would say, "Arre, he is just spending what he inherited. God made him one of the upper caste. It is written in the Vedas that men are born low or high by god's will. And it is punishment from god that the poor don't have a morsel to eat."

Ask a *maulvi* or a priest the same question and he would reply, "Are you a *kafir*? You must be an atheist. God makes people rich or poor to run his world. It is not for humans to interfere in his ways. Consider poverty a blessing and live as per god's will. On the day of judgement you will rewarded accordingly."

In a melon city, where a foolish king like Baksh Singh can relish the fruits without any labour and enjoy paradise on Earth, what hope is there for devotion and loyalty to a god?

The Nawab of Ullu (owl) city, Namaqool (nonsensical) Khan, is another epitome of wealth. Like Baksh Singh, he too owns large tracts of land and lives in affluence. The walls of his toilet are sprayed with perfume and washed with rose water. His men wander across the country and abroad in search of beautiful women to bring to him. They are rendered stale for him after just a glance. Hoards of *hakeems*, *veds*, and doctors prepare medicines and energising mixes for him. Expensive, aged liquor is bought from the basements of Paris and London.

Not even the tongues of Indra's fairies could match the softness and redness of the nawab's feet. Many husbands have been killed for coming in the way of his animal instincts, while many still rot in prisons over false charges. An annual income of Rs 60 lakh does not suffice for him and every year a loan of Rs 10-15 lakh needs to be taken. The government has bestowed him with several honours. In the viceroy's court, he is seated right at the front. Namaqool Khan and Baksh Singh are assigned the privilege of giving lectures and reading out congratulatory letters in honour

of the viceroy. Lords, big or small, sing praises of the intelligence, management skills and public service of the two. Pandits, Maulvis, pastors and priests all say the Nawab's wealth is god's blessing and a reward for his *karma*.

Ironically, those who incite violence against each other and oppose each others' beliefs, hold the same views in this case. It as though the Vedas, the Quran, the Old Testament and the Bible all teach one thing – that it is the duty of all religions to safeguard the selfish interests of these blood suckers, and even after death the best palaces in heaven, with beautiful gardens, large-eyed *apsaras*, rivers of wine and honey are reserved for Nawab Namaqool Khan, Maharaja Baksh Singh and their likes because they built a couple of mosques or some temples and, at their doorstep, some *sadhus* and *fakeers*, Brahmins and *mujawars*, relished *halwa-puri* and *kebab-pulao*.

There is no reward for the poor for their life of poverty, but for those who fast every *ekadashi* or every month of Ramadan and go for pilgrimages to *tirths*, on hajj and visit holy sites regularly without caring about anything; or those who feed the *sadhus* and *fakirs* even when they haven't had anything to eat themselves. Then, they can manage to get a small corner in paradise and an *apsara* if any are left. And so, in the hope of such a heaven, the poor bears the burden of life and its troubles.

Earlier, Earth was believed to be a flat surface and beyond seven mountains and seven seas in the north was heaven. But in the 20th century, geography offers no place for heaven. The Sumeru mountain, the place of Indra's Amravati and Kshir Sagar, the dominion of Shesha Naga are nothing but stories now. The paradises of Christians and Muslims too have been rooted out of their originally-believed geographical spaces.

Is it not then fraud to keep people hungry on a false hope of heaven and paradise?

(Translated from the Hindi original by Naushin Rehman.)

<https://thewire.in/123248/rahul-sankrityayan-religion-excerpt/>

Courtesy: The Wire



Rise of Modern Medicine in India

Dayaram Varma

"Long years ago, we make a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour. When the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance. It is fitting that at this solemn moment we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of humanity."

- Jawaharlal Nehru'

I see before me the bottled water kept for the dignitaries on the dais. It reminds me of three classes of Indians. One who can afford bottled water; others who manage to get some water in their taps or in a nearby tap or a pump irrespective of its quality or regularity of supply; the third set of Indians are those for whom drinking water is a daily problem and who will be ready to drink any polluted water.

- I. K. Gujral

Of all the dynasties that ever ruled India, the British rule was the shortest and yet the most pervasive. As Kosambi DD (*An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, 1975) pointed out, India is a land of long survivals, where many different modes of production manage to co-exist. Until quite recently, one could see cow dung cakes, an essential fuel for cooking by the poor, drying on the outer wall of the Indian Atomic Energy Establishment in Trombay, which houses a nuclear reactor. Almost everything that ever existed in India, with the exception of the Indus valley civilization, is still there to varying degrees; but modern India and all its current institutions bear the imprint of the British Raj more than of any other historic period. Modern medicine founded by the Raj occupies a special place. It was something new. It would have come even without the British intervention, but when is uncertain.

There are three distinct features of modern medicine. First, it is entirely new to India. Two, its scope has progressively increased over the years, in particular since the end of the colonial rule. And, three, it is secular and an effective cultural challenge to Ayurveda, mired in mysticism and Hindu nationalism. However, the obvious popularity of modern medicine in modern India is because it has opened the possibility of a healthy society; first by its ability to treat diseases which were untreatable in the past, and second, by treating medicine as an integral part of the universal system of healing based on constant renovation.

India has emerged as a medical tourist centre. Anything that can be done anywhere can be done in India. Indeed if it were not for the cost, India provides the most efficient healthcare for the rich. Let me contrast it with Canada which has a free and accessible medical system. Almost everyone has a family physician. Suppose, you are diabetic and, suppose, your family physician deems it necessary to have your kidney and visual function (both of which tend to deteriorate

during diabetes) tested by specialists, it might take several months before it is done. In contrast, in India, if you have money, you can go to one of the many fancy hospitals and the whole thing can be done within a few hours.

But India is a poor country. Mansion and slums co-exist side by side, as do the hungry and the over-fed. A substantial population lives in the villages and modern medicine exists in urban areas. Even for urban slum-dwellers, modern medicine is rarely accessible, while Indian dignitaries go to the US or UK for medical help, more to exhibit their wealth or political power than for getting what they could not get in India.

Modern India is home to almost 250 million middle-class, relatively prosperous citizens, more than the total population of most countries. These 250 million people generate more health problems requiring medical care than do the remaining one billion. These prosperous 250 million are taken care of by profit-making, well-equipped modern hospitals which have mushroomed and can provide as good medical care as anywhere. However, this new phenomenon of the hospital industry is no solution to healthcare; indeed it is a deterrent as elaborated by Dr. Arnold Relman quoted by Dr. Melvin Konner (*The Crisis in Healthcare*, 1993)

Dr. Arnold Relman, a leading physician and the former editor of The New England journal of Medicine, [one of the most, if not the most, important journals of clinical medicine has written, “ The growth of the medical industrial complex continues unabated.” Dr. Relman is by no stretch of the imagination any sort of socialist. He believes that “If most of our physicians become entrepreneurs and most of our hospitals and health-care facilities become businesses, paying patients will get more care than they need and poor patients will get less [physicians] will be seen as self-interested businessmen and will lose many of the privileges they now enjoy ... as trusted professionals.

I think situation in India is worse than in the US. Perhaps one needs a Prime Minister who could nationalize all private hospitals, as Indira Gandhi did for banks.

There are three groups of diseases. Most diseases are minor problems and the patient would recover without any treatment. The second are serious life- threatening diseases, which can never be treated by even the most advanced Ayurvedic or Unani-tibb physicians, but can and are managed by modern medicine and its associated support system. The third is a group of diseases which are currently incurable, but sufficient leads exist to suggest that modern medicine, and only modern medicine, would be able to treat them in the future.

On the other hand, social factors give rise to new disease; and diseases uncommon in a certain group of people tend to become more common; for example, heart disease, diabetes, testicular cancer, and so on. How environmental factors, and even the misuse of existing medication, are hindrances to a healthy society requires surveillance and research. New approaches become necessary to deal with this. This is an unending process but not beyond the reach of modern medicine.

Modern medicine eliminated smallpox, bubonic plague and polio. Cholera can be prevented and treated. This is no mean achievement. If cholera still haunts India, it symbolises a lacuna in governance and not in medicine.

India like any other country must use its resources efficiently and must take steps to deal with mass poverty and the affections it causes. It costs no less to train an Ayurvedic or Unani-tibb physician than to train a physician in modern medicine. All Ayurvedic and Unani-tibb training institutions must be transformed into schools of modern medicine, and any drug or procedure of proven benefit in indigenous medicine incorporated into the modern medical curriculum.

Modern medicine offers appropriate therapy or surgery for many common diseases of India, pulmonary tuberculosis, malaria, pneumonia, diabetes, trachoma, breech presentation and toxemia of pregnancy, AIDS, venereal diseases, cardiac diseases, etc. The efficacy of the medical system can only be evaluated when we consider its success in treating these ailments.

There is an implied sense of ethics in all professions; in medicine, it was emphasized by Sushruta, Hippocrates, Avicenna and others. Violation of medical ethics by physicians of modern medicine has been pointed out as a problem by many (see Sheikh K and George, *Health Providers in India: On the Frontiers of Change*, 2010). However, the question of medical ethics cannot be examined in isolation, nor can it be ensured in the absence of ethical governance. Nevertheless, private by employees of teaching and government hospitals is a serious constraint on the efficiency and universal availability of therapy at these institutions. Abortion of female fetuses must be made a criminal offence.

The two important needs of the Indian society are sanitation and the removal of poverty. India needs universal healthcare. If Cuba, Britain and Canada can provide it, India can too. Modern medicine, though introduced by the colonialists, is now as Indian as parliamentary democracy.

Pre-colonial India was fragmented into multiple enclaves ruled by despotic feudalists. British made India into one country. Since they left, regional political forces have been steadily emerging, threatening the unity of India (Khilnani S, *The Idea of India*, 2012). Indian secularism is threatened. Indian democracy is in practice barely more than periodic elections. But whatever happens to India, science has its own power; and modern medicine, introduced by the Raj will not only survive but become more universal.

(The excerpts from the Book 'Medicine, Healthcare and the Raj' written by Dr Dayaram Sharma posthumously published by Three Essays, Gurgaon.

The Book can be obtained from Three Essays, B-957, Palam Vihar, Gurgaon (Haryana), Phone Numbers: 91-124 236 9023, +91 98681 26587)

Medicine, Healthcare and the Raj: The Unacknowledged Legacy

Daya Ram Varma,

Three Essays, Gurgaon,

Rs 500, pp 196

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Why I Won't Advocate Vegetarianism

Sunita Narayan

Recently at the release of our book *First Food: Culture of Taste*, which discusses the link between biodiversity, nutrition and livelihoods, I was asked a question. “Why do you not, as an environmentalist espousing the cause of traditional and local diets that are sustainable, condemn meat eating? After all, meat production is bad for climate—agriculture contributes roughly 15 per cent of all greenhouse gas emissions and half of this comes from meat production. It also has a huge footprint in terms of land and water consumption since an estimated 30 per cent of the world's land not covered with ice is used to grow food, not for humans but for livestock. A 2014 University of Oxford study on British diets found that meat-rich diets—defined as eating more than 100 g of meat per day per person—emitted about 7.2 kg of CO₂ per day as compared to 2.9 kg of CO₂ emitted by vegan diets. So, figuring out the sustainable diet should be a no-brainer, I was told.

I differed. As an Indian (I underline Indian) environmentalist I would not advocate vegetarianism for the following reasons. One, India is a secular nation and the culture of eating food differs between communities, regions and religions. This idea of India is non-negotiable for me as it reflects our richness and our reality. Two, meat is an important source of protein for a large number of people, hence critical for their nutritional security.

Thirdly, and this is what distinguishes my Indian position from the global, meat eating is not the key issue, it is the amount that is consumed and the manner in which it is produced. A recent global assessment, for instance, finds that Americans on an average eat 122 kg per year per person and Indians 3-5 kg per year per person. This high meat consumption is bad for health and the environment. In fact, the average American consumption of meat is 1.5 times the average protein requirement.

It should not surprise us that the bulk of the 95 million tonnes of beef produced in the world comes from cattle in Latin America, Europe and North America—all produced with extremely high environmental impacts. Meat production in the developing world is very different, says this assessment by the International Livestock Research Institute, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation and the International Institute for Applied System Analysis. Here livestock subsists largely on grasses and crop residue.

But the most important reason I, as an Indian environmentalist, would not support action against meat is that livestock is the most important economic security of farmers in our world. Indian farmers practise agro-silvo-pastoralism, that is, they use the land for crops and trees as well as for livestock. This is their real insurance system, not the banks. Livestock is also not kept by large meat businesses but by big, small, marginal and landless farmers. It works because the animals have a productive purpose: first, they give milk and manure and then, meat and leather. Take that

away and you will take away the base of economic security of millions in the country, greatly impoverishing them.

Let's get the facts straight. In the past, cattle were kept for draught purposes. In the 1980s, the late N S Ramaswamy, the country's only expert on animal energy, had calculated that the installed capacity of 90 million work animals was equal to the installed capacity of the electric power in the country. All this changed with mechanization. By 2000, livestock was primarily kept for milk. This is why the males of cows and buffaloes have drastically reduced in each livestock census. Males are now roughly 28 per cent of the total cattle population. Their main purpose is breeding. But cows and buffaloes give milk for seven-eight years of their 15-20 years of life. Farmers use this productive phase for the birth of calves and for milk sale. Maintaining animals is not cheap. My colleagues have calculated that if the animals are fed properly and looked after well it costs about ₹70,000 per animal per year. This is why farmers need options to take care of the animals not producing milk. Or they will have no options but to leave the animal stray, to eat the plastic cities throw away and die.

This is why I would not support a ban on meat or leather. By doing this we are literally taking away half the potential income the livestock owner possesses. It is stealing from the poor, nothing less. Just imagine if government entered our homes and took away half our assets or made them valueless. What would we say? Banning meat is cruel demonetization.

But I also understand that religious sentiments are strong. These demand that cattle (not buffalo) should not be killed. In this case, the answer is to buy back each cow from the farmer, build large gaushalas that can take care of them and find ways of dealing with the remains so that even after death, no product is sold or used. The answer is not militant vegetarianism. The answer is definitely not vandalism and violence.

Courtesy: Down To Earth

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An Official Journal of Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samitee, India

THOUGHT & ACTION

Committed to Build

Rationalist Society

Issue - 3



Vol - 17

Oct – Dec 2017

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Dr. Narendra Dabholkar
(1945-2013)

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Act on Prevention of Social Boycott

After successful introduction of Maharashtra Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and other inhuman Evil and Aghori Practice Act, 2013, Maharashtra is the first state to pass Maharashtra Protection of People from Social Boycott (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2016 (Mah Act No XLIV of 2017). The Bill was passed in both the houses of Maharashtra Legislative Assembly and Council and was sent to Central Govt for approval by the President on 16 Nov 2016. The Bill was approved by the President of Govt of India after prolonged consultation with six relevant departments and Commissions who gave NOC to the bill. The details were published as Maharashtra Gazette Notification and has come into force with effect from 3 July 2017

The Act was passed on the pre dusk eve of 125th Birth Day of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar with unanimous vote by all political parties of Maharashtra which is a fitting gratitude offered to him to strengthen the Constitution further. On this occasion Maharashtra ANS expressed its gratefulness to all Members of ruling and opposition parties. Very next day after passing this Act by both the Maharashtra houses, Telangana State also showed interest to pass the Bill and requested for a copy of the same. Thus this Act has become a Guiding Model to all States.

Dr. Narendra Dabholkar, the founder of the ANS had started a campaign against the caste panchayats and had organised a series of meetings across the state under the program named "Caste Panchayat Eradication Mission" ("जात पंचायत मूठमाती अभियान"- Jaat panchayat muthmati abhiyan) Dr. Dabholkar held a series of meetings as part of this campaign at various places. Meetings were held in Nashik and Pune and plans were made to take the campaign to other parts of the state. Meanwhile Dr. Narendra Dabholkar was murdered brutally. In spite of this horrendous act of murder of ANS founder, Avinash Patil, Executive President and the ANS activists took the issue and conducted meetings and campaigns at various places against Caste Panchayat and received very good response from all walks of life and affected victims.

Four years ago not even a single complaint about this kind of most-hurtful action that could be inflicted upon any human being. There was no Law under which police authorities can take action against the so called 'trustees' of caste who excommunicate the person and /or its family members on pretext of some silly reason or misdeed and impose heavy fine. Govt published a notification stating that authorities can take action based on various sections of Indian Criminal Procedure Code. But this notification did not serve any purpose since police authorities have to take permission every time from Depts of Law and Justice as per IPC Section 153 (a). It resulted into enormous delay and the culprits have no fear of law or moral values and are free to do anything. They may even resort to take revenge

on the complainants and terrorise them. As such there was an urgent need to have an independent law which will strengthen hands of the authority.

In fact ANS succeeded to abolish 13 Jaat Panchayats voluntarily after convincing the Trustees. But hundreds of Jaat Panchayats are still practicing excommunication methods on their brothers and sisters. This could be prevented only by powerful Law without any ambiguity. MANS drafted a Bill - Maharashtra Prohibition of Social Boycott Act, 2015 - with the assistance of Adv Nirmalkumar Suryavanshi, an able legal expert and an activist, under the proficient guidance of Avinash Patil. The draft was submitted to Govt of Maharashtra in 2015. The delegates of ANS took up follow up action with the Legal Minister and Minister of Social Justice and at the Sessions held during these years. Due to pressure from ANS and the media Home Ministry published a Bill " Maharashtra Social Boycott Prevention Act, 2015" on 18 Nov 2015 on their website. MANS revised the details of the act and issued a modified Draft with the assistance of BARTI of social Justice Dept. Mr. Devayani Pharande, MLA took this issue during the Assembly Session. Just two days before Mr Devendra Fadnavis, CM arranged a meeting on the insistence of ANS. The meeting was attended by Ramraje Nimbalkar, Chairman Legislative Assembly, Mr Ekanath Khadase Sr Minister, Mr. Ram Shinde, State Home Minister, Ms Neelam Gore, Shivasena MLC, Rajanish Seth, Secretary, A B Patil, Dy Secretary, Avinash Patil and Krishna Chandgude. ANS convinced the meeting that Eradication of Caste Panchayats is just not a problem of Law and Order but also a problem related to Social Justice. There was a whole hearted response from the members of the meeting. Just last day of the budget session both the houses unanimously passed the Bill on 13 April 2016. For this Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis deserves kudos. CM congratulated assembly members for passing such a progressive and far reaching Bill.

No person or group of persons shall gather, assemble or congregate at any time and at any place with the view or intention to deliberate on issue of imposing social boycott on any member of the community. Such gathering or assembly or congregation shall be treated as an unlawful assembly and every person convening and organizing such assembly and every member there of participating therein shall be punishable with a fine which may extend to one lakh rupees or imprisonment of three years or both. Any offence punishable under this Act shall be cognizable and bailable. The law stipulates that whoever imposes or causes to impose any social boycott on any member of his community, shall, on conviction, be punished with imprisonment. Such Caste Panchayat, any individual who has voted in favour of the decision or participated in decision regarding social boycott taken in such meeting shall be deemed to have committed the offence. When a Magistrate imposes a sentence of fine, the Court may, when passing judgment, order the whole or any part of Compensation to victim. The fine recovered to be given to the victim and his family, as the compensation. ANS is trying its best for rehabilitation of the

victims and adequate compensation. MANS will prepare a special plan for proper and effective implementation of this law. The Govt had sought assistance for framing the rules and regulations in this regard. MANS is planning a campaign for implementation of this law.

This is a one more feather in the cap of ANiS who strives hard for social justice and prevention of exploitation in the pretext of religion, caste, creed and wealth.

■ ■ ■

After 27-yr-long struggle to be accepted, couple takes caste panchayat head on

Chandan Haygunde

In January 1990, Umesh Chandrakant Rudrap of the Telgu Madelwar Parit Community, who lived in Pune Camp area, got married to Manju after a period of courtship. Manju lived in the same neighbourhood and was a Buddhist. The caste panchayat of the Telgu Madelwar Parit Community refused to accept the inter-caste marriage, and decided to boycott the couple. In the years following the boycott, Rudrap and Manju struggled to be accepted by the community, but their efforts were in vain. Today, after 27 long years, Rudrap said members of the caste panchayat have been sending messages to him through “middlemen”, indicating that they were willing to lift the social boycott.

The “change” in the caste panchayat’s stance came only after Rudrap filed a complaint against 17 members of the caste panchayat last month, at the Kondhwa police station, under the newly-enacted Maharashtra Protection of People from Social Boycott (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act. His was the first case in the state registered under the Act, which was passed by the Maharashtra state legislature in April 2016, and which came into force on July 13, 2017. The punishment for an offence under the Act includes a fine of up to Rs 5 lakh and imprisonment of up to seven years, or both. Rudrap, who lives with his wife and two children at Shivneri Nagar in Kondhwa now, says that because of the social boycott, he was not allowed to attend weddings, funerals and even religious functions organised by community members.

“Whenever I attended a marriage or a funeral of a member of our community, the caste panchayat members raised objections to my presence. Thrice, I was treated in an insulting manner during marriage ceremonies because of the social boycott. It hurt me badly,” said Rudrap, who works as a driver. Recalling how she was never invited for any functions meant for woman members of the community, like the traditional Haldi Kumkum, Manju started sobbing. “When I attended some of the programmes, I was ignored and snubbed,” she said.

Rudrap said while his parents were not socially boycotted and were invited for community functions, they were always warned that their son and daughter-in-law would not be allowed to attend such events.

“Inter-caste marriage is not wrong. We are respected in our friends’ circle and the neighbourhood. But the treatment... the disrespect in our own community, for doing nothing wrong, disturbs us always as we see our children facing the same problems,” said Rudrap.

“Every year, children who do well in studies are felicitated by the community. My son is pursuing a post-graduate degree in commerce and my daughter has completed her Standard XII. They were never felicitated despite scoring well. My children never complained, but they do feel bad about the abuses we kept facing... we want our children to receive the respect that we lost due to the social boycott. So, for the sake of my children, in 2009 and even later, I wrote to the caste panchayat members, apologising and requesting them to lift the social boycott... but I always got a negative response,” said Rudrap. It was then that Rudrap — with the assistance of activists of the Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti (MANS), founded by late rationalist Narendra Dabholkar — and in the presence of a dozen more socially boycotted families from his community, filed a police complaint.

The Kondhwa police then registered an FIR and arrested the 17 caste panchayat members mentioned in the complaint. All of them were later released on bail. “After the FIR was registered, no caste panchayat member called me directly. But they have sent messages through middlemen, like the elders of our community, telling me that I should take the case back and then they will lift the social boycott against us... There are attempts to pressurise me. But now I cannot go back as the case is in court. There are at least 40 more couples in my community who have been socially boycotted due to inter-caste marriages... I hope all of them get justice and the caste panchayats put an end to their wrong practices,” said Rudrap.

When contacted, Sunil Kodgir, vice president of the caste panchayat and one of the accused, refused to comment, saying the matter was sub-judice. Members of the from Telgu Madelwar Parit Community are originally from Andhra Pradesh; they later settled in Pune. Rudrap said his grandfather migrated to Pune many years ago and since then, his family has been living in the city.

<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/after-27-yr-long-struggle-to-be-accepted-couple-takes-caste-panchayat-head-on-4784388/>

Courtesy: Indian Express

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“Answer Us, Uttara Kodi, Jawab Do”

Three-week long social media campaign launched to seek justice

It has been two years since the assassination of Prof. M. M. Kalburgi, the former Vice Chancellor of Kannada University, Hampi. Kalburgi was a noted scholar in the field of culture of the people of Karnataka. His murder on 30 August 2015, the murder of Narendra Dabholkar on 20 August 2013, and the assassination of Govind Pansare on 20 February 2014, reflect the murderous mentality of fundamentalist forces which have been responsible for spreading hatred, intolerance and violence in the country. Such attacks and threats strike at the root of democracy, which the state is obliged to protect. The state's duty to defend our fundamental right to life, and to freedom of speech and expression, thus, needs to be reiterated and demonstrated.

The campaign “AnswerUs/UttaraKodi/JawabDo” has been launched today, 9 August 2017, to demand the state and the central governments to take the necessary steps towards a thorough and speedy enquiry into the murders of Kalburgi, Dabholkar and Pansare, and arrest the culprits at the earliest. This three-week long social media campaign is initiated and organised by the core group of the “[I am Kalburgi](#)” Facebook Page from Karnataka along with the [Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmulan Samiti \(MANS\)](#). The campaign is supported by the noted rationalist Narendra Nayak, Kannada poet Chandrashekhar “Champa” Patil and other public intellectuals.

The “AnswerUs/ UttaraKodi/ JawabDo” campaign uses social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Google plus, WhatsApp, et al to reach to a wider audience, both nationally and internationally. The social media campaign aims to seek the attention of the CMO, PMO and the Judiciary to answer why the culprits behind these assassinations have not been brought to justice even after four years of committing the crime.

MANS volunteer Anannya said that earlier in the year, one of the arrested accused in Pansare's murder was released claiming lack of evidence. She added that “we want the ignorant government to react” because right to justice is a fundamental right under the Constitution and “justice delayed is justice denied.”

One of the major demands of this campaign is for Karnataka government's immediate attention in passing the anti-superstition bill as a homage to Dr. Kalburgi. Narendra Dabholkar originally drafted the anti-superstition act, which was passed in Maharashtra Assembly following his murder and pressure from MANS.

This social media campaign starts from 9 August and extends till 30 August. 30 August 2017 marks the second death anniversary of Dr. M. M. Kalburgi and 20 August 2017 is Narendra Dabholkar fourth death anniversary.

<http://indianculturalforum.in/2017/08/09/answer-us-uttara-kodi-jawab-do-for-dabholkar-pansare-and-kalburgi/>

Dabholkar murder: Activists flay Govt. for Slow Pace of Probe

An online campaign #JawabDo (give answers) is questioning Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and the law-enforcement agencies about the slow pace of investigation into the murder of rationalist Narendra Dabholkar four years ago in Pune.

The campaign initiated by the social media team of the Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmulan Samiti (MANS) raises one pertinent question every day.

Images associated with different quotes, strictly in accordance with the case and judicial system, are being shared on social media tools, asking online users to join the campaign. The slain rationalist was the founder of the MANS.

“We want to question on the negligent behaviour of the government; we want to harness the growing force for social transformation,” said Mukta Dabholkar, daughter of Dr. Dabholkar.

The campaign is also spreading to Karnataka in Kannada and English where Prof. M.M. Kalburgi was killed and investigation agencies are yet to find the culprits. Similar campaign is being spread to Kerala in Malayalam, while members of the Tarksheel Society in Punjab are doing it in Hindi and Gurmukhi.

The online initiative is part of a month-long ‘ *Hinsa ke khilaf, manvata ki aur* ’ (against violence, towards humanity) campaign. “The message must be spread to as many people as possible and the social media is an effective tool to do this. A large number of youngsters use social media and they are sympathetic with our movement,” said Vinayak Hogade from Kolhapur, a member of MANS’ social media team.

“We want justice to Dr. Dabholkar, Mr. Pansare and Mr. Kalburgi by taking this case to a logical conclusion. The investigation must speed up as the Dabholkar murder will complete four years on August 20. Our job is to raise questions and we will continue to do that,” said Ms. Dabholkar.

<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-mumbai/dabholkar-murder-activists-flay-govt-for-slow-pace-of-probe/article19500749.ece>

Courtesy: The Hindu

Struggle to Preserve Democracy

Megha Pansare

The veteran rationalist thinker, writer and communist leader Govind Pansare was brutally assassinated in Kolhapur on February 20, 2015. More than two years have passed, but justice remains elusive. The same is true for Narendra Dabholkar and M.M. Kalburgi, whose second death anniversary is three months away. All three men were also killed by right-wing fundamentalists.

The investigations into the assassinations have been very slow and have moved only because the Dabholkar and Pansare families have petitioned the high court to monitor the investigation. The police have managed to arrest only two suspects so far and two have been absconding. All the accused are associated with the radical Hindutva organisations Sanatan Sanstha and Hindu Janjagriti Samiti, with their totally unconstitutional agenda of establishing a 'Hindu Rashtra' in the country.

The chargesheets filed by the police in the Dabholkar and Pansare cases clearly mention that the accused are absconding since the Margao bomb explosion case in Goa in 2009. In spite of objections on the pressure tactics used by the lawyers of the accused and the spokespersons of Sanatan Sanstha, no action has been taken against them. The state government has not yet declared the absconding suspects as wanted in the Pansare case. The investigation officer is changed at every interval and the activists' demand to hand over the case to a dedicated team for investigation is also pending with the government.

Fundamentalism has no religion

It is really painful to define 'justice' in cases where people are killed because their ideology and expression of thought are not acceptable to some. Regardless of political affiliation, the government seems to be insensitive in solving these crimes and punishing the guilty. Not even a single arrest has been made in Kalburgi's case yet.

Fundamentalism and fanaticism is not a characteristic feature of any specific religion. Farook Hameed, a young activist of the Dravidar Viduthalai Kazhagam (DVK), was killed by Muslim fundamentalists on March 17, 2017 in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu. The DVK is an offshoot of the Dravidar Kazhagam founded by Periyar in the 1940s and propagates atheism and rationalism. Being an atheist in individual life is something accepted by the society, but it seems one cannot propagate atheism the way others propagate a religious faith without risking one's life. Farook openly expressed his ideology. He had posted comments about atheism, criticising religion and caste on his Facebook page. He was the administrator of a WhatsApp group called 'Allah Murdad,' meaning 'There is no God'. The result: he was killed, reports say, by his own friends. Farook's murder is in fact a threat to all Muslim youths who embrace atheism or even rationalism.

The Coimbatore incident is, in essence, no different from those where the victims belonged to the Hindu religion and were killed by Hindu fanatics.

Shrinking freedoms

The situation in India is growing more complex by the day. The space for free expression and freedom is shrinking rapidly. The fascist forces are trying to shut voices of freedom and we are compelled to fight the battle in the available space.

The campaign of returning awards by the writers and scientists brought the anxiety of intellectuals before society. They were concerned about everything that is going against the principle of equality, freedom of expression, cultural diversity and secular values in our nation. There have been three 'yatra's, or journeys, of writers and poets to express solidarity with the families of Pansare, Dabholkar and Kalburgi so far. The first was a part of the Dakshinayan campaign in which 14 eminent writers from Gujarat visited Pune, Kolhapur and Dharwad, where the three rationalists were killed. Then a team of Marathi writers and activists followed the same route during their journey to Goa for a national conference in defence of freedom of expression held in November, 2016. In February 2017, 11 members of the Progressive Writers' Association, Madhya Pradesh travelled to Maharashtra, Karnataka and Goa. They condemned the respective governments for failing to arrest the killers. Based on their dialogue with local people in these regions and their experiences, they will write books, plays and hold discussions to spread their thoughts across the Hindi speaking belt.

As the atmosphere of fear and intimidation grows, hundreds of writers and artists visited the historical place of Dandi, Gujarat to hold a silent protest march on January 30, 2016 to commemorate the death anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. A platform of collective voices of the left and Dalit movement was created in Mumbai Collective, while Delhi observed Pratirodh I and II with a clear stand to enjoy the right to dissent and free expression. The progressive forces in many towns, small and big, in the country have started organising programs like seminars, book publications and poetry recitations to protest against the attacks on women, minorities, progressive people and Dalit communities.

Criminalising rights

The atmosphere of fear exists, not only because of fundamentalist violence, but also because of the criminalisation of peaceful expression. Many have been attacked by the self-appointed nationalists and so-called religious people, while many from the minority communities, especially youth, have been arrested, held in pre-trial detention, and subjected to extensive criminal trials by the government machinery.

Fear of such repression, combined with uncertainty as to how the statutes will be applied, leads others to engage in self-censorship. State governments are using draconian laws such as the sedition

provisions of the penal code, the criminal defamation law and laws dealing with hate speech to silence dissent. These laws have been repeatedly used for political purposes against critics.

There have been major attacks on free speech in the country from the government itself. The information and broadcasting ministry under the BJP government has become an image manager for Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The government's advisory to news channels not to telecast the Nirbhaya documentary and serving a legal notice to the BBC for airing the Nirbhaya film India's Daughter, issuing show cause notices to channels on Yakub Memon's execution coverage, banning a documentary on beef – all of this tell their own story. The BJP government has crushed the resistance of the students from the Film and Television Institute of India against the appointment of a pro-BJP director and has charged JNU students with sedition. It has appointed RSS affiliated people in various academic institutes. There have been cases of deaths of journalists, intellectuals, attacks, arrests, threats, sedition, defamation and censorship of films, broadcast media, print media, music, cyber media and hate speech. The attempt to impose a one-day ban on NDTV India, the filing of a complaint against an Outlook investigation on child trafficking in Assam, the trumped up cases against human rights activists in Bastar, are all attempts to silence the media and the voices of democratic dissent. Reporters covering the courts have been assaulted by lawyers, taken into police custody and their access to the courts restricted.

The bigger picture

The time has come for thinkers, writers, poets, artists, scientists to overcome this feeling of intimidation and regenerate the society. Thinkers can become an explosive, powerful force. We have seen some examples in our freedom struggle, in Revolutionary Russia, Latin America and Africa. We have seen recently in India that the individual writers chose their timing of dissent in tandem with other fellow writers. Their act wasn't solitary, but in solidarity with others.

At such a crucial time it will be unfortunate, if the real thinkers stop writing or speaking or expressing their views. The active thinkers can awaken society, create standards of morality, humanism and honesty and preserve them. The absence of thinkers causes civilisations to collapse. We have been observing this decay with our own eyes. The process of decaying has taken alarming speed. Make the people think aptly at individual, collective level and at the level of small groups is the first step. To create a live internal debate is the second and going to the people and thinking together, is the third.

We have seen Russell taking a stand against war, we have seen Sartre taking a stand against the US in Vietnam, and we have seen Chomsky and many others taking a stand against the aggressive foreign policy of America. Many writers opposed Franco's dictatorship. We have seen and heard Dabholkar, Pansare and Kalburgi doing this during many social campaigns. We have seen them expressing their views fearlessly throughout their lives. The strategy to fight the battle with right-wing

forces, in Pansare's words, is 'shatru-mitra vivek' (Śatru-bandhu bibēka). The regressive forces are in power not because they have support from the majority of people, but because the progressive forces are scattered and not united. The union of the left and Dalit movement can challenge the communal forces in power, he used to say.

So, if now the government at the Centre says that people should sacrifice their desire for justice and truth in the national interest, in the name of nationalism and patriotism, it should be opposed. If there are forces, which declare that India will be a Hindu Rashtra by 2023 or 2025, they should be opposed. For this is a secular nation and will remain secular. This is a democratic nation and will remain so.

Courtesy: The Wire

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Obsession with Rape Accused Babas

Bhavdeep Kang

Murder, rape, castration, abduction — a rap sheet as long as his arm and yet Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh Insan's followers are 'ready to die' for him. Many of those who sought to intimidate the state government and judiciary by converging in large numbers on Haryana's Panchkula town (where the verdict in the rape case against him will be read) in support of the 'Love Charger' guru, are well-educated, wealthy and socially prominent; certainly not wild-eyed fanatics.

The question of why mentally sound individuals are willing to sacrifice their health, wealth, family and friends at the behest of a godman continues to puzzle social psychologists. It is not that such people are chronically depressed or don't value their lives; it is just that they value their guru more. In contrast with political or social activists, they are unconcerned with the social outcomes (constructive or destructive) of their actions. The guru is an end in himself.

Last year, Karnataka Congress MLC VS Ugrappa claimed he was viciously trolled by followers of Raghaveshwara Bharti, head of the Ramachandrapura Mutt, for denouncing police inaction in the sexual harassment cases against the godman.

In 2014, Jagat Guru Rampalji Maharaj's refusal to surrender to the law led to a violent faceoff between his followers and the Haryana police at his ashram in Barwala, resulting in the death of four women.

Likewise, Asaram Bapu, his son and Nithyanand Swami, jailed on charges of rape, continue to enjoy a substantial following.

Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh stands out among the herd of dubious godmen, not just because of his colourful personality, vast political network and success in evading the charges against him, but the blind dedication of his army of followers across all castes and classes.

Why would Hans Raj Chauhan submit to castration while in the prime of life, a surgery allegedly performed by doctors at the Dera? He claims (according to press reports) to have joined the cult at the age of 16, at the behest of his parents and quit only in 2009, after developing health complications following the surgery. In 2014, the Punjab and Haryana High Court handed over the probe into the alleged castration of 400 Dera Sacha Sauda followers to the CBI.

Nor did Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh's followers suffer any diminution of faith when, in 2007, the CBI finalised three chargesheets against him, for the murders of former Dera manager Ranjit Singh and Sirsa-based journalist Ram Chander Chhatrapati and the sexual exploitation of female inmates. The latter was based on a probe ordered after an anonymous letter to then prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in 2002.

Yet another probe was ordered into the mysterious disappearance, in 1991, of Faqir Chand, an accountant at the Dera Sacha Sauda (the CBI tried to close the case in 2010, but it was revived by the High Court in 2016). An expose by a news magazine a decade ago alleged institutionalised sexual exploitation of 'sadhvis', forced castrations and a string of mysterious deaths.

Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh's followers don't buy it, maintaining that he is the victim of a conspiracy. But who would conspire against him? The Congress has sought his assistance in fighting assembly elections, as have the BJP and the Akali Dal.

BJP general secretary Kailash Vijayvarghia famously called on the godman at his 'Teravas' in Sirsa, with an entourage of ministers and MLAs in tow, to thank him for his support in the Haryana assembly polls. State chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar returned the favour by giving the Dera a clean chit, after the High Court demanded that its premises be searched for illegal arms and ammunition. The power of devotion is formidable: it creates suicide squads, enables a David to beat Goliath and mobilises a hundred thousand people to defy the law, bringing to a halt rail and communications networks! Ultimately, their devotion is based on a dependency syndrome. So central is the godman to the lives of his devotees, so essential to their identity and concept of self that they will 'die' for him. The devotee is more invested in the divinity of guru than the guru himself, because without it, his life lacks meaning.

Granted, most humans are vulnerable to the idea of a 'higher power'. Evolutionary psychologists trace this concept to the uniquely human ability for symbolic reasoning. The capacity for abstract thought enables humans to cooperate with genetic strangers in large numbers towards a cause bigger

that they are, be it nation, community, religion — or a godman. (Women in particular are educated, through cultural symbols, to surrender their all to a higher cause.)

The dependency on the 'higher power' has been enhanced in the last few decades by abrupt socio-economic transformation. Community ties have weakened and society atomised, rendering the individual rootless and faceless. He or she finds a locus and an identity in the community of devotees around a godman.

The dissonance of modern life — where the individual either strives for wealth or, having found it, realizes that it does not bring happiness — drives people to seek a spiritual solution. The godman becomes their spiritual preceptor, psychologist, family confidante and business advisor. He holds out the promise of happiness, lays out a road map, takes away the burden of decision-making and invests life with purpose and meaning. And best of all, unlike an abstract deity or an idol, he is present in physical form. He can be seen, touched and heard.

The followers are thus open to brain-washing, or coercion through the threat of exclusion from the cosy community. At times, devotees may lose faith in the godman, when they perceive that he no longer has all the answers.

The Beatles abandoned Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Mata Amritananmayee's personal attendant fled from her, Sathya Sai Baba's devotees accused him of sexually exploiting children. But such instances are the exception, not the norm.

Some analysts see the growing clout of spiritual entrepreneurs as a consequence of the increasing religiosity in Indian society. Meera Nanda, in *The God Market*, observes that "India is not free of the forces of politicised religiosity which expresses itself in a growing sense of Hindu majoritarianism". Globalisation, she contends, has sharpened religious identities, fuelled by a state-temple-corporate nexus.

Perhaps that explains the success of Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh. The Dera Sacha Sauda was one of many cults in Punjab and Haryana when he took over in 1990. He expanded it many times over, leveraging his personal charisma and launching a variety of social welfare campaigns. His distinctly un-godmanlike behaviour — belting out rock songs and starring in home productions with sketchy social themes, high-end motorcycles and bizarre, bling costumes — is interpreted as reaching out to younger devotees. As the number of his followers has grown, so has his political clout — to the point where he now feels secure in challenging the secular power of the state.

<http://www.news18.com/news/india/opinion-gurmeet-ram-rahim-singh-insaan-to-asaram-bapu-what-makes-people-worship-rape-accused-1500875.html>

Courtesy: News18.com

Ahimsa at Odds

K S Jacob

Propagating ahimsa, while permitting structural violence, suggests ethical blindness for individuals and an absence of an enlightened vision for society. India needs to move from a narrow concept of ahimsa to a broader vision, which renounces structural violence.

Reconciling ahimsa with structural violence pervasive in India exposes the contradictions of the human condition and mandates introspection for individuals and society.

Ahimsa

Ahimsa refers to non-violent approaches to life, which do not cause injury or harm to others. The philosophy argues that violence has karmic consequences and applies the concept of non-violence to all living beings. The concept evolved over time and was initially developed to abjure animal sacrifice. Gradually, ahimsa in individual lives extended to vegetarian food habits among the upper castes. Stricter dietary restrictions include renouncing root vegetables and following vegan diets, as eating tubers and dairy products are perceived as violence against plants and animals, respectively.

Ahimsa was championed by Jain and Buddhist philosophy and religion. Over time, the idea of non-violence extended to the notion of *adrohi*, a cardinal virtue necessary for an ethical life, which implies not causing injury through thoughts, words and actions.

While ahimsa was considered the highest ideal, ancient Indian scriptures also recognised exceptions to the rule. Classical texts discuss concepts of lawful violence for self-defense, proportionate punishment and theories for a just war.

Gandhi championed the concept of ahimsa and his model of non-violent satyagraha helped India gain independence from British rule. His example spread its message to the world.

Structural Violence

On the other hand, structural violence refers to the way social structures cause harm or disadvantage to individuals. It describes social arrangements that are embedded in political and economic organisations, which cause systematic harm to people. While behavioral violence can be pinned on individuals, structural violence is due to historical and cultural forces, which constrain people.

Structural violence is often distal in the causation chain and works through many intermediary mechanisms, which are blamed for unfortunate consequences, making it difficult to assign causality for harm caused to vulnerable groups. Nevertheless, it highlights different social and institutional failings that have dire consequences in people's lives. Some examples of structural violence are briefly highlighted.

Gender Injustice

Patriarchy, common in most parts of the country, upholds the institution of male privilege and mandates female subordination. Its prejudice and bigotry are translated into a compulsive preference for boys and discrimination against the girl child. It has spawned practices such as female feticide, infanticide, dowry, bride burning and sati. It has led to the neglect of nutrition, health care, education, and employment for girls. Women's work is socially devalued and they often have limited autonomy in decision-making.

Caste Conundrum

The caste system, with its societal stratification and social restrictions, continues to have a major impact in India. The system generally identified with Hinduism is also prevalent among Muslims, Christians and Sikhs.

Reduced access to maternal and child health care is evident with reduced levels of antenatal care, institutional deliveries and complete vaccination coverage among the lower castes. Stunting, wasting, under-nutrition and anemia in children and anemia in adults are higher among subordinate castes. Neonatal, postnatal, infant, and under-five statistics clearly show a higher mortality among scheduled castes and tribes.

Dalits continue to face social discrimination and exclusion and are targets of communal violence. Assault, rape and murder of Dalits by the upper castes are common and yet, frequently these crimes are not investigated and punished by the authorities, despite laws and protection provided by the Indian state.

Poverty and Capitalism

India's economic development masks inequity in the country and the human cost of progress. The country ranks low on the Human Development Index, while its Gini Coefficient suggests marked inequality. For millions of Indians, hunger is routine, malnutrition rife, employment insecure, social security non-existent, health care expensive, and livelihoods are under threat.

The vibrant economy, "the shining India," is restricted to the upper classes, while majority in the country eke out a meagre existence on its margins. Millions of poor and tribal people have been moved from their ancestral lands to make way for development projects. These schemes, meant to lead the country to economic progress, seem to be mainly for urban and rich Indians. The promise of *nirvana*, via the trickle-down economics of capitalism, is surely a cruel trick on the most vulnerable and marginalised of people.

Apologists of the capitalist economic system betray an ideological bias with assumptions that an unregulated market is fair and competent; that the exercise of private greed will be in the larger public interest. Even a cursory examination of assets and disparities across peoples suggests that those who

succeed have inherited advantages and favourable playing fields, compared to those who do not. The focus on apparent merit does not take into account the different histories, the varied physical environment, the divergent contexts and the grossly dissimilar opportunities available.

Structural Violence Normalised

Recent tendencies, which equate imposition of the majoritarian agenda as democratic, assert that the majority is entitled to primacy in society, even at the expense of fundamental rights of other members of the population. Such “tyranny of the majority” often results in a vitiated environment, where systemic harms are common. Intolerance of diversity and chauvinism of various kinds—linguistic, ethnic, class, caste and religious—are easily escalated to violence, both structural and behavioral.

Structural violence, normalised in India, encourages majoritarian views to flourish and is presented as workings of a successful democracy. The majoritarian agenda is reinforced with bans on free speech, books, movies and food. Ghettoisation of certain sections of the population and stigmatising of others is accepted as norm. These campaigns are often enforced by threats of physical violence. Structural violence is intertwined with behavioral violence, resulting in symbiotic relationships, which augment each other.

The killing of rationalists Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pansare and M M Kalburgi argues that structural violence encourages fundamentalist groups, while those who vitiate the atmosphere disclaim all responsibility. Supporting vegetarianism, a contested moral absolute, and imposing bans on meat on a culturally diverse people while facilitating structural violence, which actually kills humans, reduces life span, and destroys livelihoods suggests clear inconsistency in practice.

Ethical Blindness

There is no universal consensus on concepts of pacifism. The traditional ahimsa-violence debate tends to treat these as opposites; behavioral violence in the individual context is divorced from structural violence in community settings. With such “motivated blindness” and an emphasis on parochial goals, the ethical implications of important decisions fade away. Ethical fading results in condoning behavior that one would condemn if one were consciously aware of it. It results in ethical lapses in our social world, which are pervasive and intractable. It is the everyday casual and hurtful prejudice—sexist innuendo, caste-based language, religious stereotyping, ethnic profiling, class-linked insinuations and small institutional inequities, that actually undergird all violence. Structural violence, like all social phenomena, requires careful elucidation. It requires an understanding of the particulars of context to make us comprehend our failures in relation to abstractions like ahimsa.

Conclusion

The major barrier to mainstreaming social justice is structural violence based on prevalent sociocultural frameworks. These need to be acknowledged as causal, interrogated and laid bare.

Pacifist interpretations of ahimsa should be viewed not only in the individual context but also examined in larger community settings. India needs to move from a narrow concept of ahimsa to a broader vision, which renounces structural violence. While practicing ahimsa in individual lives is an ideal, disregarding the need to reduce structural violence in society is a major ethical failing. Systemic injustice requires much more than a change of heart; it requires changes in social structures.

<http://www.epw.in/journal/2015/40/web-exclusives/ahimsa-odds.html>

Courtesy: EPW

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Freedom from Superstition and Unreason

Hamid Dabholkar

Superstition

It is really painful to hear about the recent instances of people believing in superstitions. The rumours being spread in and around Delhi about women's braids being chopped off is a recent example. We still have cases like a pregnant woman delaying seeing doctor because of lunar eclipse. These cases, even 70 years after the independence, tell us that there is a huge backlog in the spread of scientific temper. And we have a long way to go till we get freedom from superstition.

The Indian constitution lists "development of scientific temper, humanism and spirit of inquiry and reform" as one of the fundamental duties of the citizens. But while this remains enshrined in the text, there seems to be an appalling lack of action in that direction. As we look closely, there seems to be deliberate inaction on the part of the people in power as they prefer people falling prey to claims without questioning.

In our culture, faith, superstition, and religion are intertwined. Our Organisation, which has constitutional stance since the beginning has never opposed the right to worship of an individual, but the fight is against the exploitation in the name of religion. As Dr. Dabholkar always emphasized, there has to be constructive criticism of the religion. And this constructive criticism can be unfavourable to those who want to perpetrate the culture of not asking questions.

Another worrying factor is the close nexus between politics and superstitious practices. We had Prime Ministers falling prey to the clout of Godmen and ministers going to astrologists. Even on the ground level, there is a close nexus between local godmen and politicians. Also the economic gains out of superstitious practices fuel their proliferation. If we desire a citizenry which is not afraid of questioning, we will have to inculcate that culture since schooldays.

Currently "development" has become buzzword in the communication of the government entities. However, there is an apathy when it comes to accepting that the very notion of superstition is anti-

development. Superstition perpetuates discrimination, exploitation and harassment. Our fight towards complete freedom from superstition is a part of a larger goal, which Dr. Dabholkar had envisaged. And that is of society free from irrationality, . Freedom from caste hierarchy, addictions and moving towards society based on science, logic and rationality is the ultimate goal.

Unreason

Narendra Achyut Dabholkar was shot dead on the Vitthal Ramji Shinde bridge of Pune on August 20, 2013, at the age of 68, while on a morning walk. He used to say, “Like Mahatma Gandhi, I also have a wish to live till age 125”. Sadly his life, too, was curtailed by the enemies of reason.

The key question all of us should ask ourselves is: What has been happening in this country in the last 69 years that free thinkers who have dedicated their life to the spread of rationality have become so dangerous to somebody that they are ready to kill these leaders even in their old age?

If we start looking at the broader picture, there is a clear trend of an increasing resort to violent means to suppress any form of dissent, especially if it is related to the interpretation of religion, caste and nationality. From the case of Perumal Murugan to the incidence of violence against the Dalit community in Una, from Rohith Vemula's suicide in Hyderabad to the killing of Mohammad Akhlaq in Dadri and the JNU incident, there is a clear pattern. It will be simplistic to think that these incidents are exceptions and that if we could get hold of the murderers and masterminds, the problem will be solved.

Today, as citizens of this country, we face a serious dilemma. It is a four-pronged problem. On one side there is the pragmatically communal Congress. On the second, there is the programmatically communal BJP. On the third side is the left force of this country which has lost touch with the masses and which, by and large, misreads the effects of globalisation and liberalisation. And on the fourth side, there is the increasingly self-absorbed and expanding middle class of the country. All anti-constitutional forces are prospering in the ensuing vacuum, be it organisations like the Sanatan Sanstha or the Hindu Janjagruti Samiti whose supporters are being investigated in the murders of Dabholkar and Govind Pansare, or the self-declared gau rakshaks, or Zakir Naik and his organisation.

What is most troubling is the serious lack of concern and even antagonism that is shown by the common citizens of this country to these issues. We must keep in mind that the attacks on Dabholkar, Pansare and M.M. Kalburgi are similar to terrorist attacks. Their main aim is to crush the voice of dissent. The investigation of these attacks should maintain a similar seriousness as the probes into terrorist attacks.

The investigation of these three murders has been hampered by the inefficiency of the system. It gathered some momentum only after the high court started monitoring its progress periodically. It was very obvious from the beginning that the murder of Dabholkar was closely linked to his work for superstition eradication and that there can be more such murders. Even after repeated intimations to

the police machinery, hardly any precautionary measures were taken to prevent such incidents. Even today there is minimal effort to systematically counter the tendencies that are spreading hatred in the name of religion.

Violence in the name of religion is becoming a global phenomenon. The killers of the bloggers in Bangladesh and the suspected killers of Dabholkar, Pansare and Kalburgi pledge allegiance to different religions. The radicalisation of their mind in the name of religion is the same. If we continue to travel down this path, the day is not far when the situation in our country will be similar to that in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Though democratic protest is crucial to ensuring that the voices of reason are not silenced, it is also critical to have an effective, fast and accountable system of investigation and a judiciary that can give us confidence that we will not meet the same fate as these three rationalists if we dare to dissent.

A large section of society believes that economic growth and development can solve all of our problems. We need to understand that social justice is also very important if we want to maintain stable growth and development. All forms of unreason, especially radicalisation in the name of religion, and use of violence to achieve one's means, are barriers to economic growth. That's why we need to stand up and take a position, for Dabholkar, Pansare and Kalburgi.

All of us need to realise that killing a person cannot kill his thoughts. The murder of Dabholkar triggered interest and support to the work of the MANS (Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti) in the national and international spheres. The impact of its work increased significantly, culminating in the passing of two social justice-related laws in Maharashtra, namely the anti-black magic act and an act against social boycott and caste panchayats. Similarly, interest in the writings of Pansare and Kalburgi has increased significantly. The harder one tries to suppress the voice of reason, the louder it will become, because like violence, it is also an innate human tendency to oppose such suppression. There is no other way to a shared prosperity and social justice than becoming a rational individual and a rational society.

<http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/attacks-on-dabholkar-pansare-kalburgi-rationalist-killed-2992892/>

Courtesy: Indian Express

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Journalist Who Raged like a Fire

Preethi Nagaraj

Gauri Lankesh, 55 (1962-2017), raged like fire for causes that she believed were fair and just. Her left-leaning ideology was never about being diplomatic: it was about taking things heads on. Whether she was speaking out against communal politics or about the caste system, Gauri Lankesh never minced her words. She did not believe in building bridges to No Man's Lands. She simply went about voicing her opinions knowing fully well that they could, someday, be the reason for her early end.

As the crusading journalist had expected, the end came on Tuesday night, in the premises of her home in Bangalore's Rajarajeshwari Nagar. A group of men pumped several bullets into her frail body at around 8.10 pm. She lay there, breathless for a few minutes, till a neighbor noticed her and informed the police. Within hours, even as protestors took to the streets around Karnataka to express their grief and anger at the murder, WhatsApp messages were rejoicing the death of an "anti-Hindu" voice. Ironically, these messages would not have angered Lankesh. She had often referred to people with such hatred as her own "misled children" who would some day return home to truth and reality.

Lankesh's long career began at *The Times of India* in Bangalore in the mid-1980s but, as she told an interviewer later, she was far from being "spectacular" till she worked outside Karnataka, specifically in Delhi.

But she returned to her home city in 2000 with the prolonged illness and subsequent death of her father, P Lankesh, editor of the feisty and massively popular Kannada tabloid *Lankesh Patrike*. The tabloid was potent with facts and had strong team of political reporters who grew under the tutelage of Lankesh himself. Uncompromising integrity was the hallmark of the tabloid and this was greatly appreciated by readers. The paper never published advertisements, running only on subscriptions. Lankesh's death, after diabetes and other health complications in January 2000, left the future of the tabloid in a lurch.

New wind

Gauri Lankesh returned to Bangalore at the most difficult time both personally and professionally. She and her husband had parted ways. She felt she could not fill her father's shoes. She and her family approached Mani, the publisher of the paper, and told him they wanted to shut it down. He urged them to reconsider their decision. *Lankesh Patrike* got a new lease of life, under Gauri Lankesh's editorship.

But in 2005 a family feud ensued over the ownership of the publication and its ideological positions. Gauri Lankesh and her brother Indrajit, a film producer, locked horns over matters relating to running the paper. The paper was split into two. She named her version *Gauri Lankesh Patrike*, while Indrajit retained the original title.

The readers of *Gauri Lankesh Patrike* were spread all across the remotest villages of Karnataka. Initially, understanding the dynamics of the state from ground level was the journalist's biggest challenge. Another challenge was to overcome her English media orientation and to write in Kannada. Lankesh struggled and conquered both tasks.

By the mid-2000s, she had grown into a significant voice in regional journalism. She travelled extensively to report on issues from the grassroots. Not surprisingly, she was met with criticism. Some people alleged that she was a supporter of the Maoist movement, even though she had actually called for a meaningful dialogue between the government and Naxalites. She also gained prominence for her opposition to Hindutva forces. She was a vocal critic of Hindutva groups that wanted to take over the syncretic Datta Peetha shrine in Chikmagalur. She also took up the case of sexual harassment filed against seer Raghaveshwara Bharathi of the Ramachadrapura Mutt in 2014, earning the wrath of many of his supporters.

Defamation case

In November 2016, Gauri Lankesh was convicted in a defamation case filed by Bharatiya Janata Party MPs Prahlad Joshi and Umesh Dhusi for a report she had published in *Gauri Lankesh Patrike* in 2008, alleging that they had criminal dealings. She was sentenced to six months in jail, but secured bail and was allowed to appeal in a higher court on the matter.

Gauri Lankesh never minced words. She was no fence sitter. Two years ago, when attacks on rationalists took a new turn with the murder of academic MM Kalburgi in his home in Dharwad, Lankesh had that sensed fundamentalist hatred was spreading rapidly. But she would not be cowed down. Alongside her opposition to religious fundamentalism was a strong commitment to ending caste discrimination. She described herself as a mother to Dalit campaigner Jignesh Mewani as well as to student leaders Kanhaiya Kumar and Shehla Rashid. She ensured that their voices were heard in the far corners of Karnataka.

Not everyone appreciated her lack of respect for traditions that were claimed to be “ancient and Hindu”. Her far left views did not seem to fit the dominant narrative. But that never deterred her from believing in them and being vocal about injustice. She reminded many people of her father, who showed similar spunk and determination to whatever he deemed fit.

On Tuesday, her body was pumped with bullets but her spirit lives on.

<https://scroll.in/article/849701/gauri-lankesh-1962-2007-journalist-who-raged-like-a-fire-as-she-championed-just-causes>

Courtesy: Scroll

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Gauri Lankesh Has Taught Us Once Again How to Be Fearless

Ganesh Devy

On the day of Ganesh *visarjan*, Gauri is gone.

The last I met her was a week back.

That was at the entrance to the residence of the chief minister of Karnataka.

I had gone there with the literary critic and activist Rajendra Chenni to express our anguish over the delay in the investigation into the M.M. Kalburgi assassination case.

As I was stepping out of chief minister Siddaramaiah's house, I ran into her. She had come there to do precisely the same.

The fearless crusader who was talking last week to the CM of Karnataka about speeding up the Kalburgi murder investigation was assassinated last evening.

Exactly as Narendra Dabholkar, Comrade Govind Pansare and Dr. Kalburgi were assassinated in 2013 and 2016.

In her case, as in the earlier three killings, motor-cycle borne assailants were deployed, who fired at point blank distance, and then fled.

Reports say seven bullets were fired. Three weapons were used. Three persons committed the cold-blooded, carefully premeditated murder.

Three men, three weapons, seven bullets and a 55-year-old frail, tired, single woman.

Had William Blake been alive, he would have said in agony,

"What immortal hand or eye could frame thy fearful symmetry?"

However, the fearful symmetry of conspiracy cannot intimidate fearless and spirited voices like Gauri's.

Throughout her career as a journalist, she spoke out relentlessly, without a shred of fear, against oppression and injustice.

Even when she had to face imprisonment for her views, face isolation among activists due to her distinct way of thinking, face intimidation due to controversies arising out of her actions, she remained committed to her cause. And what was that cause? That of every self-respecting media person in the world – of placing reality as it is in public view.

Some minutes past 8 pm on Tuesday evening, the news of Gauri's assassination started coming. It spread from TV channels to mobiles like a wildfire.

By 9 pm, journalists in Bangalore, Dharwad, Gulbarga, Shimoga and many other cities in Karnataka had gathered in public places. They spoke. They took out candle-lit processions.

During the night, they took buses and trains to reach Bangalore where a meeting began at 10 am at the city's town hall. It may continue well past the sunset.

In Dharwad, where I moved to live since Dr. Kalburgi's assassination, media persons, writers, activists and students started assembling in the morning itself. We have issued a request for colleges and universities in Dharwad to remain closed for the day. Was it not Teacher's Day when Gauri was shot dead?

We will then walk in a silent rally to the centre of town. Later in the day, I plan to drive to Pune, 450 kms north of Dharwad, where journalists have called for a meeting to mourn the assassination. Many of them had never met Gauri personally. But they shudder at the kind of onslaught let loose on the media. Is the media not a centrally vital organ of democracy? That is precisely why so many journalists believe that democracy today is under a siege.

Most of us have spent a sleepless night. Late in the night or early in the morning, it is difficult for me to recall exactly when, Rajmohan Gandhi sent an e-mail from across the seas. His message combined his sense of shock and outrage at the murder and the concern for personal safety of some of us who have been vocal.

Twenty months ago, when we met at Dandi – where nearly 700 writers, artists and activists had gathered to protest the third assassination, that of Kalburgi – Rajmohan Gandhi gave a very brief speech. All that he said was that Gandhi learnt how to be fearless from Kasturba. "Be fearless," he said, "That is the only way to fight fascism."

Gauri has taught us once again how to be fearless. Let us have the Mahatma's humility to learn it from her.
The times are strange, and they can get stranger still.

<https://thewire.in/174534/gauri-lankesh-ganesh-devy/>

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'Intolerant Voices Find Strength in our Silence'

Chaitanya K.M

"Be careful about what you post on social media. We live in dangerous times," I told Gauri Lankesh last week. She replied saying "We can't be so dead. It is human to express and react. What we feel impulsively is usually our most honest response."

On Tuesday night, she was shot and killed in cold blood. The killing was not impulsive. It was well thought and carefully planned, like the murders in Maharashtra and Karnataka of the rationalists and thinkers Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pansare and M.M. Kalburgi that she had herself condemned and protested.

I grew up in a family of writers. My father, K. Marulasiddappa, and P. Lankesh, Gauri's father, were colleagues and close friends. Lankesh was an English lecturer. My father taught Kannada.

We lived in the same neighbourhood. My mother often left me in the care of the Lankesh household. Whenever I argued with Gauri, she used to joke saying “Magane (child), I used to babysit you before you learned how to speak.”

But the best quality in Gauri was that one could always argue with her, dispute her and tell her she was wrong. And no matter how fierce our arguments, she respected our right to say what we did. We were close friends because we could disagree. It was a quality that she inherited from her father.

Gauri’s father was a firebrand writer and thinker. In 1980 he launched the *Lankesh Patrike*, a tabloid in black and white. It carried no advertisements. Lankesh believed that publications succumb to favouring rich corporations or powerful government officials and politicians because they sponsor ads that are a crucial to a newspaper’s survival. Lankesh believed this would kill journalistic integrity. He decided that *Lankesh Patrike* was to run purely on circulation.

It was a different era for the media in India. Print was powerful. Doordarshan television and All India Radio were state owned and broadcast sterile government versions of news. Print was the only independent space.

A socialist and rational thinker, Lankesh became a torchbearer for liberal thought. He exposed casteism and communalism where he saw it. He spotted and patronised rebellious and outspoken young thinkers like the scholar D.R. Nagaraj and the poet Siddalingaiah who went on to become important voices in Kannada culture and political thought. But he never groomed his children to step into his shoes.

Gauri Lankesh once said that she wanted to be a doctor. When that didn’t happen, she took to journalism. She started her career in the English press, working with reputed publications like the *Times of India*, *Sunday* and *India Today*, before her foray into electronic media with Eenaadu TV.

Her siblings Indrajit and Kavitha forayed into cinema. On January 24, 2000, P. Lankesh wrote his column for that week’s *Lankesh Patrike* and put the edition to bed. The next morning, he was dead. It was sudden and unexpected. He was no more but he left behind what was a respected and revered brand in journalism.

The siblings went to Mani, publisher of *Sanje Vani* and *Dina Sudar*, who was also publishing *Lankesh Patrike* and told him that they wanted to close their father’s tabloid. Gauri felt that her father did not groom his children to take over the tabloid. She did not think they were its “natural” heirs. To those close to her, she said “We can’t fit into his shoes.”

Mani is said to have chided them. He told them that they should give the tabloid a fighting chance.

Her brother Indrajit decided to continue the newspaper in his father’s name. Gauri started her own tabloid, naming it *Gauri Lankesh Patrike*. By the time she started it, she had already been a journalist

for 16 years. The electronic side of the media was booming. The circulation of most Kannada tabloids was waning. She was embarking on a venture that was going to be financially downhill from day one.

Gauri held true to her father's ideals. Her tabloid was vocal on secularism, the rights of Dalits, the downtrodden and women. And she kept her father's firebrand nature alive in her writing. She minced no words while criticising right wing and caste-based politics. When social media became the in-thing, she was all over it. Her Facebook wall and Twitter handles reflect her fearless and frank view on various political issues. She wasn't embarrassed about becoming emotional about people or ideas that she cherished. Last year, after hearing Kanhaiya Kumar's speech, she invited him to Bangalore. She wrote on social media, calling him her son.

Gauri Lankesh has been trolled and called names. There are those who belittled her, saying she was just basking in her father's glory. She has been called a naxal sympathiser, anti-national, anti-Hindu and a host of other names. But none of this could faze her.

Last week, I jokingly told her that she doesn't understand social media and technology. She replied "Those who understand technology are silent. I will do what I can and I will say what I should. These intolerant voices find strength in our silence. Let them learn to argue using words instead of threats."

<https://thewire.in/174439/gauri-lankesh-journalist-killed-obituary/>

Courtesy: The Wire

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Who was Professor Yash Pal?

Eminent Indian scientist and academician Professor Yash Pal passed away at his residence in Uttar Pradesh's Noida district late Monday night (24 July 2017). The 90-year-old scientist had earlier battled with lung cancer and overcame the disease around five years ago. He was admitted in hospital due to age-old ailments at the time of his death.

Professor Pal was born in 1926 in Jhang district of British India that is now in Pakistan. The 1976 Padma Bhushan award-winning scientist did his graduation in Physics in 1949 from Punjab University and went on to complete his Phd in 1958 from Massachusetts Institute of Technology with specialisation in high-energy physics, astrophysics, communication, science policy and space technology.

He gained recognition because of his contribution in the study of cosmic rays. His science-based programme on Doordarshan titled 'Turning Point' made him a cult figure during the 90s. He had held the position of professor at Tata Institute of Fundamental Research in Mumbai. He also served as the Director at Space Applications Centre in Ahmedabad for almost nine years, between 1973 and 1981.

Professor Yash Pal was later appointed as the Chief Consultant of the Planning Commission in 1983-84. He acted as the Secretary of Department of Science and Technology, a position that he held for two years, from 1984 to 1986. He was appointed as the Chairman of University Grants Commission (UGC) where he served a full single-term of five years. During his term, Professor Pal started several innovative programmes to improve the standard of education.

In the international arena, he served as a member of UN Advisory Committee on Science and Technology for Development. He was also a member of Scientific Council, International Centre for Theoretical Physics, Trieste and Executive Committee and United Nations University. He was also the Vice-President of IUPAP and INSA Council between 1980 and 1981.

Owing of his achievements in the fields of science and academics, Professor Yash Pal was awarded the Macroni International Fellowship Award in 1980. Indian Science Congress Association (ISCA) bestowed on him the prestigious GP Chatterjee Memorial Award in 1987. He was also honoured with the Association of Space Explorers Award in 1989.

In 2013, Professor Yash Pal was given the country's second highest civilian honour, the Padma Vibhushan.

Pushpa Bhargava, Scientist And Activist, Dies At 89

Jacob Koshy Serish Naninsetti

Veteran molecular biologist and a vehement critic of genetically modified crops, Pushpa Mittra Bhargava, died at his home in Hyderabad on Tuesday (1 Aug 2017). . He was 89. He is survived by a son and daughter.

Dr Bhargava, while active, had recently developed kidney complications and was undergoing dialysis. “This morning he had a fever and was resting at home,” said Rakesh Mishra, Director, Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad, “He passed away in his sleep.” Bhargava was the founding director of the CCMB.

Though Bhargava had ceased to be an active researcher for over 20 years, he remained engaged with issues in science and policy. A strident critic of multinational seed companies, Bhargava was opposed to the introduction of genetically modified crops — from cotton to brinjal and, most recently, transgenic mustard — in India. His argument was that these crops posed health hazards and required decades more of tests before possible clearance.

He had led what came to be called the Award Wapsi programme in 2015 when scientists and litterateurs returned their awards against what they called rising tide of intolerance in the country.

He however, didn't confine himself only to matters of science. In 2015, Bhargava was among the scientists who returned his Padma Bhushan — in solidarity with writers and artistes — protesting the “climate of religious conservatism” and underlined by incidents such as the murder of scholar, M.M. Kalburgi, and the lynching of Mohammed Akhlaq in Dadri in Uttar Pradesh . “The Dadri incident in which Mohamed Akhlaq was lynched in a pre-planned manner (probably by fringe elements that are related to BJP) showed the control that BJP wants to have on what we may eat and what we may not, just as it wants to control what we may wear or whom we may love or what we may read,” the scientists had said.

Bhargava also moved the Supreme Court against an initiative by former education minister, Murli Manohar Joshi, to introduce astrology in universities.

“He was a tireless crusader against irrationality and superstition. He had the ability to connect seemingly disparate dots and had an overarching vision about the future. Honest and upright to a fault, he was fearless when it came to his beliefs,” said Chandana Chakrabarti, who worked with Bhargava at CCMB and co-authored *The Saga of Indian Science since Independence* with him. The book is a unflinching look at the failings of Indian scientific establishment.

“It is a great loss for the country. He brought modern cell and molecular biology to India. Prior to the CCMB there was no lab for research on cell, DNA and molecular biology. Public understanding of

science, interaction with government and policy makers was his forte. He was a great talent scout,” said D. Balasubramanian, who was a professor with the University of Hyderabad when he was inducted into Centre by Bhargava as his deputy.

Bhargava was chairman of the Drafting Committee for the Assisted Reproductive Technologies (Regulation) Bill 2013. The Bill was the culmination of a 15-year struggle as he mobilised and marshalled support by meeting legislators and policy makers. The draft Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill was approved by the Union Cabinet in 2016. However, Bhargava opposed the ban on surrogacy, instead calling for protection of the rights of surrogate mothers.

Bhargava was also vice-chairman of the National Knowledge Commission. In his role as a founder director of CCMB, he also invigorated the art scene in Hyderabad by inviting artistes from across the country and creating a residency programme.

Scientists and officials of CCMB expressed their grief at the demise of Mr. Bhargava. “He remained deeply engaged in social issues, particularly those relating to the impact of science on society in India and the world. His extraordinary energy and commitment will continue to always inspire us in our future endeavours. He will be greatly missed,” said the staff.

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/pushpa-bhargava-scientist-and-activist-dies-at-89/article19403218.ece>

Courtesy: The Hindu

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True Commitment to Science Will Restrict the Practice of Religion

Pushpa M. Bhargava

Science and religion both concern us because we can't do without science and its derivative, technology, and religion has been woven into the fabric of our society over many centuries. However, the methods that science and religion use to find an answer to a question, to solve a problem or simply to find the truth, are fundamentally different.

Science uses the scientific method, or the experimental method, which is based on reason and logic. It consists of four distinct steps: the framing of a question on the basis of careful observation or analysis of existing data, the formulation of a testable hypothesis, the performance of experiments to check the hypothesis and, finally, arriving at the answer. One may of course in certain circumstances omit the steps of hypothesis and experiment and replace them with the use of existing knowledge and reasoning, but that isn't really important. What is important is that the method of science has a built-in

corrective and that the conclusions that one arrives at by using this method are verifiable and repeatable.

Religion invokes religious texts or religious traditions often codified by religious teachers. Their origin is largely revelation. Truth was revealed to and not discovered by all the religious leaders of the past – be it Moses or Mohammed, Christ or Buddha. Revelation is the method of religion.

The present government at the centre is largely under the influence of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which is committed to making India a Hindu country. Further, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government does not seem to understand science or give it any kind of priority, say from the point of view of funding. In other words, the present government is religion-oriented rather than being science-oriented, and it therefore becomes interesting to compare science and religion and identify the points of similarity and difference between the two.

The differences between science and religion are numerous while the similarities are few. Let us look at some important differences first.

According to the current scientific view, our universe came into existence some 13.8 billion years ago following an event called the Big Bang. We can't know what happened exactly at the Big Bang but we can trace the history of the universe with a fair degree of certainty from 10⁻⁴¹ seconds (an extremely small time) since its happening. Religions tell us that God created the universe – and that's it. No further explanation is provided. Science has explanations as to how the various objects we see in the sky with the naked eye or with telescopes were formed; religions have no such explanations.

Science tells us that man has evolved from lower forms of life by a slow but continuous process of evolution; virtually all religions contest this Darwinian theory of evolution and believe that man was put on earth by God as the fully-formed creature of today.

Testability and refutability

One of the important attributes of science is that it allows one to make testable predictions. It was scientists' ability to make predictions with considerable certainty and accuracy that allowed man to land on the moon. Indeed, in the one grand experiment that the first manned landing on the moon was, an enormous number of predictions made by scientists in a variety of fields came true. If one of these predictions had gone wrong, there would have been disaster.

Science has allowed us to predict chemical elements, fundamental particles, planets and biological species. For example, the great Russian chemist Dmitri Mendeleev predicted the existence of the elements gallium, scandium, and germanium in the middle of the 19th century. He said that when gallium is discovered, it'd melt with the heat of the human hand. Its melting point was later found to be about 30 °C. The Austrian-Swiss physicist Wolfgang Pauli predicted the existence of the fundamental particle called neutrino in 1930 (which is now very much in the news). It was discovered in 1956.

Murray Gell-Mann, who like Pauli was Nobel Laureate, predicted the existence of another exotic fundamental particle, the omega minus, in 1962. This particle was discovered by Nicholas Samios in 1964.

The existence of Neptune and Pluto was predicted, too, before they were discovered. In the case of Pluto, the exact place in the sky where it should be found, on that fateful night in March 1930 when it was discovered, was foretold as well. Charles Darwin's theory of evolution predicted the existence of the *Latimeria* (coelacanths), a fish, and *Pithecanthropus erectus* and *Oreopithecus*, two ancestors of man. Both the fish and human ancestors were discovered later: the fish as a live specimen and our ancestors as skeletons. Both were found to have the characteristics predicted by Darwin and his disciples. In the entire history of religions, there has not been a single such prediction that has subsequently come true.

Another important difference between science and religion is that while science is truly international, religion is not. Scientists all over the world use the same method: the method of science. They employ the same techniques, use the same materials, and publish frequently in the same journals. They are increasingly beginning to use the same language (English), and they form a truly international community in which the professional links are at least as strong as, if not stronger than, any other link.

Contrast this internationalism of science with the parochialism of religion. There are many religions and they differ from one another in many respects. The activities of a particular religion are carried out in isolation of the other religions. In fact, people of other religions are often prohibited from participating. There is little communication between various religions and so no common language. Religious customs and practices differ enormously, often fundamentally, from religion to religion. Religion in fact divides people while science unites them.

Godmen and the invention of miracles

Religion is defined variously as service in adulation of God as expressed in forms of worship, a system of faith, and an awareness or conviction of the existence of a supreme being that arouses reverence and the will to obey. The existence of the supernatural, a thing beyond the laws of science, is implicit in religion irrespective of what definition one adopts. In all religions, there is also provision for the supernatural to take the form of what appears to be natural. Thus, messiahs or avatars are born on this Earth and God takes the shape of man or even other creatures as is supposed to be the case with some of the incarnations of the Hindu deity Vishnu.

It is this inherent belief that underlies religion, which has led to the emergence of various forms and shapes of godmen, be it Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Shri Satya Sai Baba, Acharya Rajneesh, or whatever have you. These godmen would like others to believe that they have supernatural powers that can't be understood by other men and that their statements and actions must as a result be accepted by others

without question. Science on the other hand does not accept the existence of a high priest, a godman or any other authority that/who can't be questioned. In fact, science denies the existence of the supernatural.

One often witnesses or hears about events which, in the opinion of those who are religious, can have only a supernatural explanation, an explanation outside the scope of the scientific method. In the view of science, all such events – assuming they ever occurred – do have a scientific explanation, often simple and ingenious.

There will be no belief in God if there were no miracles. Such events by definition cannot have a scientific explanation; they are the very essence of religion. Science does not believe that any miracle has ever occurred, and that events that *have* occurred and have been termed as miracles have had a scientific basis. There is much untruth behind the story of miracles. For example, for Mother Theresa to be canonised, two miracles that had never occurred were invented. Religion even allows you to bribe God to perform miracles for you.

Belief in the existence of the soul and in the phenomenon of rebirth pervades most religions. According to science, there is not a shred of evidence in favour of the existence of souls or rebirth. Every claim of rebirth that has been examined in detail has been shown to be fake.

Science and religion are mostly incompatible

Lack of belief in religion or what religion considers to be true can lead to punishments. The Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543) had to recant his ideas because he had said that it was not the Sun that goes round the Earth but the Earth that goes round the Sun. Galileo Galilei, a follower of Copernicus, died under house arrest on account of holding on to Copernican beliefs. And before Galileo, the Italian philosopher Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) was burnt at the stake for reasoned dissent, which is disliked by religion – as we're currently seeing in India. As recently as within the last two years, three distinguished rationalists have been murdered in our country. History is full of religion-based wars.

Having said all this, one may now ask what about values which indeed are an integral part of all religions, and not a special characteristic of any particular religion. Scientific truths are value-free but the practice of science generates values, many of which overlap with universal religious values: truthfulness, integrity, ethics and honesty. Unfortunately, a particular religion receives its identity not from its values but from its dogma. And one does not need religion to have these values.

There are other differences between religion and science. For example, religions (such as Christianity and Islam) are evangelistic while science is not supposed to be.

So, what we can infer is that science and religion are mostly incompatible. A country's true commitment to science would therefore automatically put some restrictions on the practice of religion,

just as religious values that are supported by science would put a restriction on the use of technology – for waging wars or for other destructive purposes.

<https://thewire.in/15720/a-countrys-true-commitment-to-science-will-restrict-the-practice-of-religion/>

Courtesy: The Wire

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From Wall Street to the World of Giving

Vinita Deshmukh

*(Sunil Deshmukh, USA based philanthropist and former corporate leader of Wall Street speaks at length to **Corporate Citizen** on his admirable journey from a student in the USA pursuing Masters in Chemical Engineering to his passion of social crusade through the Maharashtra Foundation Social Service Awards that he established two decades back, to recognise social reformers in India.)*

Could you tell a little bit about your background?

My background is anything but glamorous. I come from a very lower middle class family from Sangli, a town in West Central Maharashtra. My father's salary was a mere Rs 500 per month. I stood fourth in the State Secondary School Certificate (SSC) exam and yearned to be a lawyer. But my father told me, "Look, we have no money to eat, so you have to earn your own bread. Lawyers kill flies, so you should become a doctor or an engineer". I was afraid of seeing human blood, so the only alternative left for me was to do engineering. Now, which branch of engineering to pursue? There were rumors that chemical engineers earned Rs 50 per month more than mechanical engineers, so I went for chemical engineering. So, this is the story of how I planned [!] my career.

Where did you pursue your graduate and post graduate studies?

I did my Chemical Engineering from Mumbai's Institute of Chemical Technology (UDCT). During those days, all graduates of IITs and UDCT, like a train going through the tunnel, came out at the other end in the USA. That's how I did my Masters in Chemical Engineering from Cleveland State University followed by a MBA from Indiana University. Again, nothing spectacular there.

How did you start your career?

I started working for Exxon Oil Refinery as a Chemical Engineer. Here, I did two things that are unusual in life compared to the rest of them. First, I quit Exxon and went to a law school in the USA. In 1977, not too many Indians went to law school. In fact, it was unheard of-partly due to lack of fluent English, and partly because of the accent. Although the American democracy is known to be "of the

people, by the people, for the people”, it is actually “of the lawyers, by the lawyers, and for the lawyers”. Lawyers control every aspect of life here. I wanted to join the winning team and also fulfil my childhood dream of becoming a lawyer. I did law and with this unique engineering, business and law combination, I joined British Petroleum (BP) in their US headquarters in Cleveland, Ohio. I did a phenomenal job for them because 95% of lawyers in US have either English or Philosophy as their basic degree, but very few have technical background. Any legal matter in an oil company has the underlying subject matter that is technical, which I knew very well. As a result, they put me on a Fast Track Internal Program where they train and rotate you through various assignments, as you are considered among the future leaders of the company. As a part of that, they made me an oil trader which means I was trading crude oil for BP. Until then, I did not even know that something like oil trading existed. I did this for a couple of years. This is another unusual thing I dabbled into and I really liked it. My counter parties in oil trading were Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley and the likes on the Wall Street. Somehow, Goldman people liked me and called me for an interview. Robert Rubin, the Managing Director of Goldman (who later became the Treasury Secretary of US), interviewed me. He sat for one hour and at the end of it, made me an “offer I could not refuse” so to speak. I was really naïve and at that time Wall Street was a highly secretive club. They gave me a huge salary jump. Even then, I was not sure, because I had a phenomenal career path guaranteed in BP where I would have ended up being at least a VP or Senior VP in due course. Should I then go for Wall Street and risk this assured path by joining a risky career like commodity trading? By the way, I didn’t even know such a thing called “bonus” and Wall Street bonuses are really massive—you get a base salary, but the bonuses can be 200-2000% of the salary. Wall Street is a different world. It is a win-lose game; there is no win-win. You win, they give you a big bonus; you lose, and in six months you will be immediately sacked. So I took that risk. That is commodity Futures and Forwards trading what they call here as ‘leedho deedho dhanda’. I took one risk deviating to go to law in American context and the second risk was to opt for Wall Street where, it’s a high risk-high reward game. Even then, I joined Goldman and later Dreyfus which approached me a couple of years later. By then, I had figured out what bonus was. They paid me well.

Louis Dreyfus Energy is one of the biggest commodity traders of the world. It is a French Jewish company, about 140 years old. I spent eight years there and was the head of oil trading. We made huge amount of money in 1992 Gulf War in oil trading and they paid me good bonus. At that time, I indeed thought about re-tiring to do social work. But, I had friends in Citibank who persuaded me to come and start commodity trading for them. I did that for two years. I was the Global Head of Commodity Trading for Citibank. Now, the question is why at the age of 45 and the peak of my career would I quit?

That was in which year?

In 1994.

You quit that time?

Yes, completely. Right from my student age, I was always socially conscious and I wanted to do something for the society. There is more to life than chasing money and I wanted to do a good turn, both for the society over here in India and also in America, as it is my karma bhoomi; my kids are born there. Hence the conscious decision to quit. I have been doing charitable work pretty much fulltime for the past 22 years except for couple of consulting assignments. If you work for five years on Wall Street, you are all set for life. You are not rich but you are well set for couple of generations. Wall Street gives you that freedom and I am grateful for it.

What is your life philosophy?

You have one life to live and you have to live it well-I don't believe in re-birth. Life is a matter of balance. You should do well for the society and also have fun. My definition of fun is not that unique. I love very rare single malts, gourmet food and travel. At the same time, I am also enjoying doing good for the society. I am working on environmental causes in the US and for secularism separation of Church and State. I strongly believe in social justice and am a global citizen. I am an atheist and know that religion and God are the concepts created by the ruling classes to subjugate women and weaker sections of society.

Any hobbies?

Intellectual and artistic pursuits. I love Ghazals and am a keen student of cosmology. I think cosmology is the cutting edge science that answers the most fundamental questions of creation and the future.

Where do you reside?

Miami Beach, Florida. With blue ocean and warm weather, good food and fun loving people, it's close to paradise.

Is your wife also working?

No. My wife Pratibha is originally from Vile Parle, Mumbai. My father-in-law Dr Keshav Tilak is settled in Toronto, Canada.

How many children do you have?

Three children.

How old are they?

Girish is 40. He is a financial advisor with Strategic Wealth Partners in Cleveland, Ohio. He is married and we have two most beautiful grand-daughters, aged five and seven. My middle daughter Nisha, is a lawyer. She went to Wharton School of Business and later did law. She is the Director of Marketing for a hedge fund in New York City. And our youngest son Sushil is a doctor. He is doing a Fellowship in Nephrology at Georgetown University in Washington, DC.

How did your family help you to just quit?

The credit goes to Pratibha, as she is not money minded at all. She is not into jewellery and other fancy stuff. In 1992, I launched the Maharashtra Foundation Awards for Progressive Literature and

Social Service. I donated two crore rupees for establishing the awards. In 1992, I could have bought a good flat in Malabar Hill for that amount and it would have been worth several crores of rupees today. You need a like-minded partner to make the conscious decision to part with that kind of money and much more that I have donated for various progressive (Purogaami) causes.

This contentment is so rare...

The credit also goes to my socially oriented nature which I inherited from my mother and my uncles who were very generous towards social causes. I have a progressive mindset we call it 'purogaami'. There are two types of charitable work. One is of the welfare kind which is 'kalyan kaari' and the other is bringing in change through social reform or 'parivartan vaadi'. Ninety nine per cent of donors do 'kalyan kaari' work give food, money, clothes and so on. This makes you feel good and the receiver also feels good. It sustains society for a day but doesn't change it. If you really want to change the society, then social reform is the answer as you have to do something deeper like fighting against corruption, dowry, superstition, caste system, and evil social customs and so on. Women's empowerment is one of the most powerful ways of social reform because the old and conservative societies like to suppress and subjugate women. Until women get education and are empowered, their self esteem will continue to be low. Even religion and god are used as instruments of control by the fundamentalists in India to deny justice to the lower classes and women. Anything that raises their self-esteem and empowers women is great; so I started these awards to recognise social workers, particularly working on women's empowerment.

Social reform work is always an uphill battle. For example, If I go to my village and start giving dollars and Polo T-Shirts, they will think that is crazy, but I will be welcomed. But if I stand in the same place and say "don't drink, don't beat-up your wife, let your daughter go to school and don't break people's heads over caste and religion", they will beat me up. So, changing entrenched mind-sets in a conservative society is very hard. That is the type of social work I promote.

Every year you have these awards right from 1994?

Yes, this is 23rd year. We have the corpus and awards are given out of the interest that we get on it. We give away nine awards per year. Life-time achievement awardees received Rs 2 lakh and Rs 1 lakh is given for social work in various fields. The award ceremony is held in Pune and awards are finalised by a recommendation committee comprising very knowledgeable people here. Then, we have the final selection committee in the USA. The process is very thorough and very transparent.

What do you think of Indian businessmen as philanthropists?

Businessmen in USA are unique. There is fair competition but creativity, merit and honest work are always rewarded. They work hard and give back generously. Not only the likes of Bill Gates, George Soros, Warren Buffet, Howard Schultz, Mark Zuckerberg who have given 99% of their wealth as charity, but 90% of all American businessmen give over 50% of their wealth to charity. Majority of businessmen in USA are progressive - most of them are socially liberal and global in their outlook. Charity and social

good is thus in the DNA of US businessmen.

In sharp contrast, majority of Indian businessmen, with notable exceptions like Azim Premji, Narayana Murthy and a few others are taking from the society but not giving back. I have a very low opinion of their ethos. I measure greatness and success not in terms of how much one makes or has, but in terms of how much one gives. On that count, Indian businessmen rank very low. A good example that I can cite is when Bill Gates came to India to sign up rich businessmen for his “Giving Pledge”, he had very few takers! Some of them claim to give away black money “secretly” or build temples as charity. That makes them look ridiculous.

Are the Indian businessmen really happy? I often see vicious family feuds over money and constant scurrying around to curry favours with the new powers. That is no way to lead a meaningful or purposeful life.

What is your message to the youth?

Everything that has fundamentally changed our lifestyle like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Snap-chat and so on has been invented, perceived and constructed by American youth under 20. Indian youngsters are toppers, gold medalists and smart people but their only fame to invention is the “missed call.” Why is there such a vast difference? It certainly is not the lack of intelligence, but it’s the lack of proper attitude and outlook on life.

American youth are broad minded, liberal and progressive (*purogaami*) in their attitude. They have open minds and have global, humanist attitude. Only people with open minds and an accepting nature can be creative, productive and happy. That is why America is the world leader in creativity, productivity and charity. Wealth is merely a by-product of progressive values.

Knowing that there are exceptions, Indian youth by and large are looking for short cuts, copying rather than inventing, are more conservative, mired in the caste equations, closed minded and bitter. Globalisation should be synonymous with brotherhood and liberal values.

What we witness in Indian youth is conservative and backward looking attitudes. Respect for women, acceptance of diversity and liberalism are not high on their priority list. Such people can never be creative and will not be able to think big, dream big, invent, create or be really happy. The choice is yours!

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Courtesy: Corporate Citizen

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Pune Heroes: Mukta And Dr. Hamid Dabholkar

Why does the Oxford of the East need crusaders against superstition? Because, just until recently, 35 km away from Pune sat Tomato Baba, who proclaimed he could cure any disease with his magical tomato juice. “About one lakh people would line up every day, many of them carrying the saline bottles they were hooked up to intravenously, to meet him,” shared Dr Hamid Dabholkar .

The main focus of the 37-year-old doctor and psychiatrist is to dispel the application of magical remedies for medical problems. He works with the Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Sameeti (MANS) set up by his father, slain rationalist and anti-superstition activist Dr Narendra Dabholkar. Hamid and his elder sister, Mukta , are clear that they are not the only inheritors of their father’s campaign. Ideology is not hereditary and the reins of MANS are in the hands of executive president Avinash Patil. Hamid oversees an MANS cell called Friends of Mind. “Most people who seek babas and tantriks could have mental disease. Our volunteers are trained to provide emotional First Aid and then guide to a rational path of psychiatry or counselling, if needed,” he said. , Mukta, an educationist, works at uprooting superstitious belief at the childhood level. The organisation has a scientific temperament cultivating cell and Mukta trains teachers to conduct these classes in schools. The idea is to have kids start a conversation with their parents about superstitious practices.

MANS fights all forms of irrationality and caste panchayats are frontal organisations for oppression, based on the caste system. As a result of MANS’s activism, Maharashtra became the first state in the country to enact a law against social boycott of individuals or families by caste panchayats. The Maharashtra Prohibition of People from Social Boycott (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2016 got the Presidential consent on June 20, becoming a full-fledged law. To make this possible, MANS recorded 250-300 cases of oppression enabled by caste panchayats — including a case where a father was pressured by the caste panchayat to kill his nine-month pregnant daughter for marrying outside her caste. “The irony of rational thinking is that its opponents are more aware of its influence and power,” Hamid offered. Mukta , who resides in Dapoli, Ratnagiri district, is part of the team that holds parishads in villages along the Konkan belt, asking villagers to relate instances of oppressive sentences meted out by caste panchayats.

All of their documented cases were used to push for the law. “There were cases of women being subjected to a virginity test,” stressed 42-year-old Mukta . “The caste panchayat would provide a white bedsheet and then examine the bleeding caused by the breaking of the hymen on the wedding night. Recently, a girl in the police training academy did not bleed because her hymen was broken by the rigours of physical exercise. The groom was urged by the panchayat to leave her,” she said. Where possible, MANS intervenes to mitigate peace.

Data revealed that women were the most oppressed by this prejudice and that social isolation could lead to depression and even suicide. “There was a man who killed himself as he could not bear the social boycott of the village; he felt guilty for being the cause of this isolation for his children,” Mukta recalled, adding, “He had married outside his caste and, for 17 years, no one from his village of 70 houses spoke to him or his children. Social boycott means your business suffers as the clientele bypasses you; you are not granted amenities such as dish TV or electricity as the village technician would not come over out of fear of the panchayat. There might be no one to lift your corpse or provide wood for your pyre.”

Mukta and Hamid Dabholkar’s work has been to prove that caste discrimination has no place in a democracy and give victims a legal recourse to fight ‘gaoki’ or the village law. In the long run, MANS hopes to establish shelters for mixed caste couples, where they can seek shelter from vengeful families. There will also be a matchmaking website for those who wish to find a partner outside their community and seminars on pre-marriage counselling for youngsters, urging them to match ideas and ideology instead of horoscopes and castes.

<http://punemirror.indiatimes.com/pune-talking-/hero-of-the-day/pune-heroes-mukta-and-hamid-dabholkar/articleshow/59903952.cms>

Courtesy: Pune Mirror

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